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THE
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OFF

COMMANDER
A. B.
CAMPBELL



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1937

WITH THE CORNERS OFF



THE AUTHOR

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*My Adventurous Life on Land
and Sea*

By
COMMANDER A. B. CAMPBELL



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TO
MY BEST PAL—
MY WIFE

FOREWORD

I've never kept a diary, and, anyway, a diary seems to me a dreary list of facts. Consequently I've had to rely on memory for my yarns. And memory is certainly akin to flesh and blood: it is stirred by an appeal to my senses. A scent of freshly turned earth has transported me to the heart of the Canadian forest. I see the tall spruce towering on every side and feel the myriad pine-needles carpeting my feet. The reds and yellows of a gorgeous sunset and I am standing on the deck of a steamer passing through the Suez Canal, watching just such a sunset across the Arabian desert. A rose-petal fluttering to the ground and I am standing in an old English garden with some one by my side, and the emotion almost chokes me. The lilt of a tune and my youth returns with a rush. A dance-hall in Rio and in my arms a girl who dances divinely, but whose name I never knew.

Regarding my book, I am glad to say that every person mentioned is real, and all are under their own names. It has been a delight to live with them again, and if any of them see themselves and would like to meet again "Cam," or "Jack," or even "Chump"—for that was my unenviable nickname at school—they will always find a shot in the locker and a fill of baccy in the pouch. God bless 'em all! They helped to make up the picture of my life, and I thank them.

A. B. CAMPBELL

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I

LOOKING BACK

ON the steps of the Grand Oriental Hotel in Colombo one evening, while trying to decide between dining ashore and returning to the ship, I was humming a tune and tapping time with a foot—one of those odd tricks that stick to a fellow all his life.

From the other side of the steps a man walked over to me and grabbed my arm.

“What is that tune you are humming?” he demanded brusquely.

I had not realized, I suppose, that I was humming, and the sudden demand very probably drove the tune from my head. At all events, I was too slow in answering for the stranger’s patience. He shook my arm irritably.

“What is it? What is it?” he insisted.

Irritated in my turn by this mild assault on the part of a complete stranger, I shook myself free and would have made off.

“I can’t remember,” I said.

“Please, please try!” the man pleaded, and he barred my way. “It is of the utmost importance. Let me explain. My name is Rivers. I am a professor of anthropology. The last time I heard that tune was in Patagonia.”

By then recollection had come back to me.

“Well,” I replied, “it is one I heard some five hundred miles north of the Athabasca river, in North-west Canada. It’s a tribal dance of Canadian Indians.”

Upon this I was simply bombarded with questions. Was it a sex dance? Would I say it had to do with hunting?

I could not keep pace with the Professor’s questioning, and in the end I went with him to his room in the hotel, where he produced drinks and a notebook. I underwent the strictest of

examinations and cross-examinations. If I managed to remember a new detail the Professor would bark, "What did they do next?" or, "Now, why did they do that?" More often than not I could murmur alternatively only "I'm afraid I didn't notice," or, "I really can't say." Altogether, the interview was thickly punctuated by the "Tchk-tchk's" of the Professor's disgust over my faulty powers of observation and memory.

"My dear sir," he said finally, laying down his pencil to regard me more in anger than in sorrow, "if only you had been taught to observe scientifically! It appears that you have had incomparable opportunity for adding to our knowledge of savage customs and rites. But through lack of scientific training that opportunity seems to have been, to all intents and purposes, quite useless! "

I relate the incident as a lead to apology. I shall be telling of many curious incidents and customs, but I shall bring to them no scientific observation. My part in life has been that of a very ordinary onlooker, and I can tell of things only as I saw them. It would hardly be expected, for example, that a man who was seeing a cow for the first time would describe it with the expert regard to 'points' which would distinguish the opinions, say, of a Highland Society judge.

While apology is going, moreover, let me make a clean breast of the whole matter. I am, it may be, a spinner of yarns. It is in this *rôle*, at all events, that such small fame as has come my way in life has reached me. Because of the appreciation which has been given to my yarn-spinning over the air I have been encouraged to attempt the writing of this book. But the truth is that I am no writer. It is one thing to get up, as the phrase goes, on one's hind-legs and tell a story. It is quite another thing to take pen and paper and give that story vitality and interest. I am made the more conscious of this fact by my experience with the British Broadcasting Corporation when first I tried to put my stuff over on the air.

How I came to be asked to broadcast I shall relate in due course. It is enough for the moment to confess that, reading from a script, I disappointed the producer in charge of me at

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the B.B.C. rather badly. I gave a sticky performance. The strict keeping to the written word was the trouble, and I said so. I begged permission to ignore the script and to tell the story in my own fashion, with my hands in my pockets if I wanted them there, and pretty much as I would tell it to a group of friends in wardroom, club, or by a fireside. The idea worked admirably—at least, as far as my own ease in performance was concerned, and in the many broadcasts I have made since that time I have not, apart from rough indication of the matter of my talks, used the written word at all.

I shall not, in what might look like an attempt to disarm criticism of faults which all too probably will become evident as this book grows, elaborate on the difference between talking and writing. So to have done with humility which may seem aped, but which is indeed sincere, I come to a third confession and apology. It is simply that I don't know just where to begin.

Wondering, as all autobiographers surely must, just where to start the story of my life, I contemplate a photograph of myself at the age of twelve.

At that age I was, according to my mother, a sweet little lad. But I look at the counterfeit presentment of myself as I was and I wonder. I wonder apprehensively. For I am dressed in a sailor suit. I grasp a wooden hoop in my left hand and the stick of propulsion in my right. There is on my face such a smirk as persuades me now (though I have no recollection on the point) that the photographer must have had a bun in offer above his camera. Only on the faces of the caged monkeys at the Zoo, when visitors make play with paper bags before them, could I have seen a like expression. And if my perhaps elderly self could meet the quondam me of the photograph young Campbell would hardly escape a sound cuff under the ear.

Is it with the lad I was then, I ask myself, that I begin my yarnings? What on earth can there be about such a brat that is likely to interest possible readers?

I ask myself these questions only to wonder if men ever really grow up towards themselves. It is easy, I take it, to

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grow up towards one's own children or to the brats of others, and to see in the happenings that so excite and amuse them, that so sadden and deject them (sometimes, it seems, to the point of heartbreak), nothing but foolish trifles. It is easy even, as in my own case, to grow up towards the smirking urchin that one sees one was through an old photograph, and to be conscious of a twitching hand. But does a man ever grow up to the boy he was in memory, to the boy he seemingly is until he returns to the dust?

There is, I suppose, nothing of a significance so deep in life as an escape by a hair's-breadth of meeting its end. This is a thing that has happened to me not once, but several times. Yet, oddly enough, the narrow shaves of my manhood, of which one at least saw the tragic end of hundreds of my kind less lucky than myself, bulk little less largely in memory than things that happened to the brat with the hoop and the bun-expectant smirk. It is true, of course, that time has mellowed the colour and softened the poignant edges of that moving picture of offence and retribution which was my schooldays. True, again, that much which was then of tragic or dramatic significance has now become mildly comic. And true, once more, that a great deal which then was hilariously funny has now lost its humour. The point is that in present recollection those events do stick. At the time they seemed just as tragic, Homeric, comic, immense, or what would you, as events that in later days acquired magnitude sometimes from being facets in the shaping of world history.

§ ii

Looking back, I can really say that the closest brush with death I have ever had was within a year or so of the hoop-and-smirk period. I was then at a grammar school in Southwark, an Elizabethan building, old, dirty, but beautiful, which has long since given place to a modern barn of a thing that I have never cared to enter. To get from home to the school I had, with some other boys, to make a short journey by train. My particular station stood on a curve of the Portsmouth

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main line, which was so pronounced that an outgoing train vanished from sight in less than fifty yards.

It happened one day, probably not for the first time, that as the train from school pulled up at my station I snatched off the cap of a fellow who was going a little farther along the line. He yelled for the cap, of course, and I went through the usual trick of running abreast of his carriage as the train steamed out, teasing him. But this time, when at the last moment I shied the cap, it sailed clean across the carriage and out of the opposite window.

Temporary appropriation of another chap's property was one thing; to occasion its loss or to damage it noticeably was another. It usually meant trouble.

"Never mind. It'll be all right!" I yelled. "I'll pick it up and bring it to school to-morrow!"

Then the tail-end of the train sailed past me. I looked round. There were no porters or officials in sight. In a flash I was down off the platform and across the lines to the other four-foot way. I had just picked up my pal's cap when, as it were, out of the corner of my eye I saw the Portsmouth express rounding the curve. At that same moment the driver must have caught sight of me, for he seemed to get hands and feet into immediate action. There was a shriek from the whistle and the screech and grind of brakes, with a spraying of sparks as the blocks engaged.

I suppose I did not realize the danger I was in. Panic might have led me into an attempt to scramble on to the platform facing me, and that would have meant certain death. What I did was to step back coolly and let the express rush past. The impact of disturbed air actually blew me on to the other line. In those days there was no electrification, and I came to little harm. I picked myself up, scrambled back on to the home platform, and made a dive for the barrier.

Then I was out of luck. The shriek of the whistle and the screech of brakes had brought out every soul of the station staff. A hand, as strong as it was grimy, shot out and grabbed my jacket collar. I was haled off to the station-master's office, in which, by this time, the guard of the

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stopped express was waiting for me. Besides him, there were other accusers. To my small mind they seemed to compose an army.

If the sudden sight of the express had left me unfrightened I was frightened enough now. They were demanding my name and address and calling me a young criminal. I saw trouble ahead—big trouble.

It came. Next morning at breakfast I saw my father reading a formidable-looking document. It was from the railway people, informing him of his son's conduct and declaring my unfitness for travelling alone.

My father was one of the old sort who didn't believe in sparing the rod. In a box by the side of his desk he kept three canes of varying thicknesses. Even to this day I can feel some of the trepidation with which I would watch his selection of a cane. Number One would be brought out and balanced, while the culprit waited apprehensively, against the offence. Then it would go back into the box, and Number Two would be considered. That particular morning, though his balancing act lost none of its effect, I knew that I was in for Number Three, and that it would be wielded handsomely. But I don't know that I quite foresaw with what strict regard for railway rules and bye-laws I would travel to school that morning, or with what quite sudden access of politeness I would give up my seat to a lady, although there was a vacant place at the other end of the carriage.

Nowadays, as I understand it, moral suasion has taken the place of the caning that at home and in school kept the urchins of my time in order. And I hear that ragging too is pretty well a thing of the past. Whether the rough-and-ready retribution, so often angrily administered, that awaited our sinning then had a coarsening effect on us or not is a point on which I will not argue. I do know that I was a fairly average young rip among a lot of rips, and that the tale of my schooldays is chapter after chapter of crime and punishment, of tricks, dodges, and devices in which even our masters were fair game.

There was a master in that first school of mine who had a

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wooden leg—the left one. By his game leg and under his desk he kept a wastepaper-basket. It was a dodge of ours to ask leave to use the basket and surreptitiously to pour ink on the trousers covering the wooden leg. This became a sort of initiation ceremony for a new boy. There was one fellow I remember who was dared to become 'one of us' by pulling off the trick. Unfortunately for him—perhaps because he was left-handed—he got mixed up as to which leg was which, and boldly strolled up to the desk to pour red ink from a stiff paper cone on to the master's right leg. I remember the still hush that fell upon the class when it was seen what he was doing, and even now I recall myself in the act of goggling, horror-stricken.

When in the course of time, like many of my kinsmen, I discovered I wanted to follow the sea under the White Ensign I was sent to a school in Portsmouth kept by a naval coach. It was a place of fine repute, and some of the boys of my own time have had very distinguished careers. The school's reputation was due to the character of the Head. It was said of him that he was of humble origin, the son of a blacksmith, but the only thing about him that betrayed the fact was his speech at times. As a teacher he was outstanding, particularly in mathematics, and the brilliance shown subsequently by so many of his pupils on the scientific side of naval activity is greatly due to his teaching. For my own part, he instilled in me a love for mathematics that I have never lost. But he had his own way of driving the subject into us. Having set a problem on the blackboard, he would call one of us out in front of the class to solve it. As we worked it out he would loll back in his chair, cane in hand, flicking us across the calves to help us to think.

Looking back, I realize now what a cruel domestic burden the Head had to bear; but as a boy, like my fellows, it meant no more to me than that his wife had embarrassing ways. Every now and then she would come wandering into the playground, fall on some boy or other, and haul him into the house for fondling and kissing.

She picked on me once to slobber over, and rewarded me

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with a large tin of fruit taken from the pantry. I got away with the prize as quickly as I could contrive, and lost no time in opening the tin for the benefit of myself and cronies. We had, however, no sooner got back into class than the Head announced a report from the cook of the theft from the pantry of a tin of fruit. The empty container, still moist, had been found in the dustbin. Until the thief either owned up or was given away, said the Head, the whole school would be kept in. That put me in a fine fix. In common with my fellows, young as we were, I knew that the Head's wife was not herself on those affectionate excursions. I could not tell him that his wife had given me the fruit in tipsy good-nature. The other fellows knew, of course, the truth of the matter; but even if I had been guilty of robbing the pantry it would have been a pardonable crime, probably, from their viewpoint. What considerations weighed with me in general I cannot now say with accuracy, but at any rate I confessed to a crime I had not committed. And I got a thorough good hiding. Ill-deserved? I'm not so sure. There was against me a long enough tally of misdemeanours, unconfessed and undiscovered, to warrant a hiding at any moment.

In that, I imagine, I was not unique. Most of the forbidden things I did were done heedlessly, without thought or calculation of any kind. And that, I take it, is the youngster method of hunting trouble the world over. The fun for me and my kind, I imagine, lay to the far greater degree in the doing of the wrong thing than in the value of its objective. There was, perhaps, an instinctive pitting of the wits against restrictive authority, the excitement of trying 'to get away with it.' This instinctive and so often objectless kicking over of the traces is, I further imagine, a biological necessity. The boy who never jumps his harness is apt, maybe, to become merely a burdened donkey.

I remember, however, one escapade with another fellow where the objective did have a glamorous value—the glamour of the theatre. I was filled with envy when this chap proudly informed me that he had hobnobbed with a genuine chorus-girl. One emotion succeeded another as he related how his

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elder brother, an officer in the Navy, had introduced him to the girl, and how she had invited him to come to see the show she was in, and to bring a friend. A perfectly dizzying prospect opened when the ultimate question came: Would I be the friend?

We went into a huddle over ways and means. The girl was providing the tickets, so that no major financial difficulty opposed. The bulking snag was to get away from evening prep. That seemed impossible to get over. It was not until next morning that a solution presented itself to the wily mind of my chum. He drew attention to the placards all over the town, announcing that on Thursday evening, at the Town Hall, Sir Robert Ball would lecture on *The Effect of the Moon on Tides*—a subject which came into our school syllabus. The idea was to ask permission to attend the lecture and to sneak off to the theatre. Against the almost certainty of being questioned on the lecture we had only to stick a *Physical Geography* in our pockets and swot the subject during the intervals. As provider of the tickets and originator of the scheme, my chum put the asking of permission up to me. I thought this only fair, and I went boldly to the Head with our request. It was willingly granted.

Thursday evening came, and we set out as if dutifully towards the Town Hall. We waited until we were well out of sight of school before giving vent to our suppressed glee and changing direction for the Theatre Royal. We had not, however, quite banished care. There was always a chance that we might run into some one who knew us, and who might give us away or even stop us. We had to do no little wriggling and squirming to hide ourselves in the queue before we found ourselves safely in the back row of the pit.

I am sure to this day that the show was magnificent. My friend pointed out the girl, and we both fell in love with her. She smiled in our direction, and we quarrelled—up to the later discovery that the girl did not know we were in front—over which of us the smile was intended for. But in the intervals we got down to our swotting. If I know anything now about the effect of the moon on tides I learned it all that night.

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Well pleased with ourselves, we sat down in class the next morning. That we would be asked about the lecture was certain, but we felt we were thoroughly primed.

The Head came in and took his place at his desk. A rapping of his cane called the school to attention.

"The two boys who attended the lecture last night will stand up."

My pal and myself got to our feet.

"You," said the Head, pointing at me, "come out and tell the school what you learned last night."

I went forward to do my piece, quite anxious to get going. I described the vast crowd in the Town Hall, and began a paraphrase of the lecture. I even went so far as to supplement my remarks with diagrams on the blackboard. When I had got out all I could remember the Head asked my chum if I had forgotten anything. My chum added a detail or two quite happily. Upon this the Head congratulated us on the retentiveness of our memories. Then he strolled over to the window. Lifting it, he called out to the gardener, "Peel, run up to the house and bring me the morning paper."

Everything, my pal and I felt, was going splendidly. The paper would give a reasonable confirmation of our story. The gardener appeared with the journal and laid it on the Head's desk.

The Head got to his feet, cleared his throat, and stuck his *pince-nez* on his nose.

"I want you all," he said, "to listen carefully to what I shall read."

The paper rustled as the Head arranged it, and my chum and I smirked complacently. The Head's voice rang out crisply, distinctively:

"On Thursday *next*, July the seventeenth, at the Town Hall, Sir Robert Ball *will* lecture on *The Effect of the Moon on Tides*."

If the window had been within jumping distance I'd have gone clean through it, I think. My pal—the fathead!—had gone astray with the date. We were only a whole week ahead of schedule!

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§ iii

A pranky boy myself, I can point by personal experience to much more distinguished men now living who were much prankier lads than I—a certain admiral, for instance.

There was an Admiralty order that boys belonging to the Church of England had to be confirmed before joining the Navy. In pursuance of this order the Head one day asked all boys eligible for confirmation to stand up. Eight of us, including myself, obeyed. The Head forthwith marched us to the vicarage and enrolled us in the Confirmation class.

This was held twice a week at the Church Hall, a point—since it meant two evenings of freedom from ‘prep’—which made the gang appreciative of the Admiralty’s tender care. A further point of appreciation, as we discovered the first evening, was that the class included as members several High School girls of our acquaintance. This news being bruited, four more boys wanted to be confirmed.

As the day of the ceremony drew near we began to feel as though we were about to be initiated into some secret society. Rumours of all sorts of esoteric rites were rife. There was talk of branding with hot irons. On the eve of the service the vicar sent a curate to give us final instructions on the step we were taking. The curate, whom we considered to be niminy-piminy, if not to say lah-di-dah, impressed on us that above all things our necks and ears and collars were to be scrupulously clean. But, above all still, he said, stretching the superlative, we were on no account to put grease on our hair, for it might soil the “deah Bishop’s” hands.

Next evening, when eleven of us were dressed for the ceremony and congregated in spruce readiness, our twelfth man came into the room. He bore a small paper package.

“Kneel down, deah boys, all of you!” he commanded. “I wish to see if youah eahs and neck are clean, and that you reahly have no grease on youah haiah!”

We all flopped obediently to our knees. He came round us, lifting our thatches carefully with a comb. As he lifted he sprinkled each scalp with part of the contents of his paper

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package and reset the hair. As the church was quite close we were to walk there bareheaded.

The girls were confirmed first. Then came the turn of the boys. We knelt at the altar-rail. Having uttered the sacred formula, the bishop began to finish the ceremony by the laying-on of hands. He had barely laid his hands on the first two heads when he began to sneeze violently. By the time it came to my turn he had ripped out four more good ones, and before he reached the end of the row the assisting clergy were joining him in a perfect fusillade.

The curate had warned us about grease on our hair, but the admiral-to-be had heard no embargo on pepper.

I don't know that reception into the Church did anything to improve our characters. We were ever in trouble, ever trying to get the better of authority, and more often than not getting found out. There was the fellow, for example, who tried to put one over on Walker, our shorthand master. Walker was unpopular, and one day while we were waiting for him to come into class this fellow wrote a disparaging remark about him in shorthand on the blackboard.

Walker came in and took one look at the board.

"Brown!" he said. "Report to the Headmaster for writing obscenities on the blackboard!"

The class was dumbfounded. Brown was the culprit, sure enough, but by what Sherlock Holmes' process of deduction had Walker jumped on his identity? Brown, more dumbfounded than anybody, perhaps, got up without a word and went to see the Head. Being nearest, I would have wiped the offence from the board, but Walker told me to wait until Brown came back. Presently Brown appeared again, red-faced, and blowing on each hand.

"Now, Brown," said Walker, "I suppose you wonder how I detected it was you who wrote this?"

"Yes, sir," Brown replied unsteadily.

"You probably all wonder," said Walker as he turned to the class. "It is elementary. Brown is the worst boy in the form at distinguishing between the 'gay-er' and 'jay-er' sounds."

Of course, in that gang of embryo admirals, navigators,

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gunners, and engineers there were several of the irrepressible sort who couldn't resist a gag even when trouble was right on them. One 5th of November it came into the head of a boy who lived on one side of a small square in the town that, his parents being away, it would be a good idea to let off some fireworks from his bedroom window. The notion was approved. Money was pooled, and a nice selection of crackers, rockets, and so on was bought. Fine fun was being had when the maid knocked at the bedroom door. There was a policeman in front of the house, she said, demanding to be told who was letting off fireworks to the endangering of life and property.

This brought us up with a round turn, and some wrangling ensued as to who should go and interview authority. At last the duty fell on me. I told the gang to shut the window and to clean up all evidence of pyrotechnics. I found the constable at the front-door, pocket-book in hand and pencil-point to tongue-tip.

"It's bin reported as some one's bin lettin' off fireworks from this 'ere 'ouse," said he.

I pretended amazement. I said it was impossible, that nobody could be so thoughtless. I was weaving my way into a fine yarn, trying to smooth him down, when my heart seemed to miss a beat.

There, suspended on a string and about a couple of inches away from the constable's helmet, was a giant cracker. The fuse was sparking away merrily. A mere second would suffice. I opened my mouth to say something, to take a breath for doing something, and the thing went off. Off too flew the policeman's helmet, knocked from his head by the explosion or by the jump he gave. That finished things for me. Scare or no scare, I began to laugh, and I laughed myself nearly silly before I got enough sense to pick up the helmet and drag the constable into the house.

He wanted some mollifying, but we clubbed together and sent the maid out for a bottle of beer. Authority mellowed at the sight of the foaming beaker. We promised that we would never do the like again. Authority quaffed and authority

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laughed. Then authority departed, and we heard no more of it.

No story of schooldays in my time would be reckoned complete without its record of fisticuffs. I did my share of scrap-ping, of course, but the set-to that sticks most clearly in my memory was not with any of my schoolmates. Though I was not much more than fourteen years old at the time I imagine I never in my life came nearer in anger to doing a human serious damage. I don't think I have ever been so furiously angry.

I was walking with a girl near the Portsmouth Dockyard one day. She was the daughter of a naval officer. Two young town louts about eighteen years old went past us, and one of them spat. The disgusting missile, so to call it, landed on the girl's frock. Infuriated, I told the fellow he would have to wipe the beastliness off. He laughed in my face, and I made a snatch for his cap as a rag to do the wiping with myself. We got to grips then, and the fellow must have tripped: I can't believe I had the power to knock him over. As he wallowed in the gutter I jumped on his chest, and again we struggled. What with the anger in me over the original piece of beastliness and disgust at close contact with his smelliness, I went berserk. I saw a sizable and sharp stone near at hand, and I reached for this, my intention being to hammer him on the temple with it. The weapon was at my finger-tip when his pal joined in, and I was rolled over by several good kicks in the ribs. Just what mess might have been made of me I don't know, but just then a couple of decent dockyard mateys appeared on the scene. They moved into action, and the two louts bolted. I have been angry many a time since then, but I cannot recall any incident over which indignation and resentment, or a desire to punish condignly, so readily wells up in me still as over that.

§ iv

I went to two schools that were kept by naval coaches, both in their different ways good men whose teaching set many a boy on the road to fame in the Senior Service and in other

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vocations. There was that remarkable man the son of a blacksmith, whose knowledge of mathematics was so profound. Many a naval man, if he happens to read these pages, will remember that Head with respect, recognizing him from some of the small circumstances I have detailed. The other coach will come to the memory of a like number, if for no other reason than his height. For 'Jacky' stood within three inches of being seven feet tall.

I had, I will admit, all the teaching I needed for passing the entrance exam for the service. That I failed was due to myself. If all my papers had reached the standard I touched with my favourite subject, maths, I should have been through with flying colours. For in that section I got 294 marks out of 300, which is something of a record. I set my failure down in good part to the mess I made of the French paper. I remember that one of the main questions, a translation, had a lot to do with the word *chou*. I could not recollect whether it meant 'pebble' or 'cabbage,' and I tossed for it. 'Pebble' won. And 'pebble' winning, I think, was one of the main causes why entry into the life I so greatly longed for was deferred to a much later stage of my existence. That my days would have been more regular if I had passed I do not doubt. Whether they would have been more interesting is a question that, for you at least who read, the pages ensuing may provide an answer.

II

I MAKE A START IN LIFE

MY failure to pass into the service was as great a disappointment to my people as to myself. But there was no intention at home of letting me mourn my ill-success in idleness. Almost before I knew where I was I found myself a very minor cog in the machinery of a country-wide concern handling money—a 'safe' job, with regular rises rewarding industry and a pension at the end. It was, in fact, just the sort of job I wasn't looking for. In less than a year I was out of it.

I didn't like the job and I didn't like the manager. He was small-minded and vicious, the sort in whom authority brings out a petty streak of cruelty, resulting in hell for those under him. Gross sarcasm in iteration from him one morning gave me just the urge needed for doing what I had long wanted to do—throw the fat into the fire. I drew off, and with a displayed fist threatened to fetch him one. Big man though he was, he went greenish-white. Then he turned and went into his office. Next moment his bell rang for the messenger.

The messenger, a nice old boy with whom I had often had a drink after office hours, came out from the manager's room very distressed.

"I'm sorry, sir," he told me, "but the manager has ordered me to throw you out of the office."

"I'll save you the trouble, Bell," said I, and grabbed my hat.

Not a little scared about how my father might take the news, I hung about for some time before going home. My father, however, made surprisingly brief comment.

"I wondered how long you'd stick it," he said.

The family went into conference that evening. I managed to make them see something of the restlessness, wanderlust, the ache for adventure, that had made my first job impossible. I wanted to travel. I begged to be given my fare to Canada,

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promising that there I would make good. Though my mother wept at the idea my father applauded it. Emigration was then at its height, and the West was the land of great promise. I picked on Edmonton, Alberta, as my objective, and my father said he would have a draft of twenty pounds waiting for me there.

The next week or two passed in the collection of an outfit. It was, as is usual with a first 'trek,' far too bulky an outfit, but in the years that followed among ice and snow I had good occasion to bless my mother for selecting such stout material for so much of my gear.

The day of embarkation arrived in fine June weather. I stood with my father and mother on the Liverpool quay till the "All ashore!" bell pealed from the *Celtic*. Then it was a quick handshake with Father, a hug and a kiss from Mother, and a dash up the gangway that the men were on the point of hoisting. The siren bellowed and the screws turned; the mooring-cables splashed. My travels had begun.

There was elation for me then, but regret too—regret that deepened as evening fell and I watched the darkening shores of England vanish from sight, the lights that beaded them grow fainter and fainter. Even now my throat can ache as I remember the loneliness that invaded me then.

I remember but little of that first voyage. In those days I did not make friends easily. I had still to learn the interest in humankind that helps one to accept, and be accepted by, those with whom one is thrown together by circumstance. The emigrant families, the Colonials returning from a visit 'home,' and the general company in the *Celtic* fell into groups like established acquaintances, but I was too young to have any notion of the natural gregariousness of my kind. I simply was lonely. There was one old fellow, however, whose kindness saw past my aloofness. He was a settler returning from vacation. And when he heard that I was making for Edmonton he gave me a letter to a friend of his there, who, he said, would give me a start.

As things were with me, I had barely begun to shake down to shipboard life when land was sighted. Then came the

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interesting trip up the St Lawrence, and the first stretching of legs ashore again in Quebec. I was still too much adrift with myself, still too bewildered by the swift change of impressions that were pounding on my young mind, to have anything but hazy ideas of that first sight of the old capital of the French province, but I know it struck me as beautiful in shape and setting. What sticks in my mind is a story I heard then which indicates with what regard Sir Wilfrid Laurier was held by the French-Canadians. A lumber-jack heard from a city man that Victoria, 'the Great White Queen,' was dead.

"Who's got her job?" asked the lumber-jack.

"Edward the Seventh," was the reply.

"By goddam," said the French-Canadian, after a thoughtful pause, "what a hell of a pull he must have had with Laurier!"

My first impression of Montreal is clearer in my mind. Quebec, with its old French air, did not prepare me for the magnificent city I landed at finally up-river. Its buildings and public offices were on a scale, and had beauties, that compared favourably with the best I had seen in London. The Bank of Montreal, with its interior decoration in which pillars of green marble are a feature, sticks particularly in my memory. But that, maybe, is in good part because of a yarn I remember.

A Roman Catholic and a Jew were walking together in Montreal. They went past the cathedral, and the Roman Catholic crossed himself. The Jew followed suit.

"What on earth did you do that for?" asked his companion. "You aren't a Catholic."

"What did you do it for?" returned the Jew.

"Because that building we passed was the Catholic Cathedral."

"Oi-oi! My mistake," said the Jew. "I t'ort it vas the Bank of Montreal."

It was during the time I stopped in Montreal that one of the biggest fires the province has ever experienced broke out. This was the burning down of the St James's Hotel. I was actually stopping at the Windsor, but during the evening had been across to the St James's for a cocktail in the famous bar

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there. In the middle of the night I was awakened by the noises of excitement outside and by a red glow in the sky. Naturally I got up and dressed to see what all the excitement was about. By the time I got over to the St James's the fire was out of all control, and the place where I had been drinking earlier on was wrapped in flames. It seemed to me, youngster-like, an immense piece of luck that I happened to be in Montreal when such a marvellous show was put up. I suppose the awful magnificence of that fire was due to the amount of wood in the building's construction. It is unlikely that the present Montreal, with its modern buildings and all the newest precautions against fire, and with up-to-date fire-fighting apparatus, will suffer a like fate. For myself, I have never seen such a fire since.

§ ii

From Montreal to Edmonton was, I learned, a four days' journey by train. I meant to travel on a 'colonist' ticket, and that, I was also informed, entailed catering for myself *en route*. Each coach was provided with a stove, at which meals could be prepared, and I could take my turn at that, so my informant said casually. This set up a new and unexpected problem for me. I knew nothing at all about cooking. Being, however, a healthy young animal, I had no intention of starving, and after some cogitation I decided to invest in a dozen tins of sardines and a case of apples. It seemed to me that on this provender I'd survive the journey, making up deficiencies at its end. It did not occur to me to buy bread and tea.

The first day in the train embarrassed me terribly. I saw people do things in public that I had hardly seen in the intimacy of family life. They also took off their boots and outer garments; behaved, in fact, like reasonably intelligent people making themselves comfortable. But in my callow way I winced. Then the savoury smells that came from the stove as the women cooked drove me nearly frantic. I opened a tin of sardines. As with so much else, I had forgotten to provide myself with a fork, and I had to dig the fish out of the oil

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with my fingers. In the coach there was an elderly woman with a brood of three children, and she seemed to take a great interest in me. This, like the young fool I was, I resented. When at last she came over to talk to me I went frigid.

"Who is cooking for you, laddie?" she asked.

"No one," I said, all up-stage. "I'm looking after myself."

"Why not join in with us and eat with the family?"

I had not then learned of the humankindness and the wonderful hospitality of the settlers in the overseas Dominions, or I would never have asked the hurtful question I did:

"How much do you charge?"

If I had struck that kind soul I could not have pained her so cruelly.

"I don't want your money," she said, and walked away.

It dawned on me then just what sort of fine kindness I had offended, and I was filled with contrition. I walked across the carriage to her and held out my hand.

"I'm sorry if I've offended you," I said. "Please forgive me."

I had an immediate and smiling pardon, and within a few minutes I was, indeed, one of the family. That kind soul was a splendid cook, and the meals I had from her hands were among the best I have ever had in my life, enjoyment of them not being lessened by the picnic conditions in which they were eaten. But she did more than fill me with good food; she taught me lessons in humankindness that, I hope, I have never forgotten, and began the process of taking the callow English stiffness out of me that helped me more than anything to shake down to the new life that was facing me. And in return for her kindness I could give her nothing but my own stock of provisions. I had difficulty in persuading her to accept even that.

After the lakes were passed the journey became wearisomely monotonous. In those days the trains were much slower than they are now, and the old story about picking flowers *en route* could easily have been true. One morning, when the engine

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had stopped for minor repairs or to take up water, I was talking with a man on the observation-platform. Suddenly out of the blue a great eagle swooped down upon a rabbit which was loppeting along the track. The rabbit, it seemed, did not relish an aerial trip with a one-cover meal at the end, and somehow it contrived to fix its feet under a log. However hard it tried, the eagle was unable to lift it off the ground. And apparently the bird's swoop had sent its talons so deeply through the rabbit's fur into its body that the eagle could not get them out. Either that or it was not minded to relinquish the kill. As quickly as the thing happened, my companion had off his coat and was running along the track towards the pair. In very little time his coat was over them and he was bringing them back to the train, amid the natural excitement of a now fairly large group of spectators. The captor was a trapper, and he killed and skinned his trophies with the skill, it seemed to me, of a professional taxidermist. The operation was one that I watched with great interest, wishing that I could see the process of mounting. Years later I did come across rabbit and eagle again, set up splendidly and most lifelike, under a glass case in the bar of an hotel in British Columbia.

My first dismay at the conditions of the journey extended to the sleeping accommodation. From the roof flaps were let down that served as bunks for two persons, and the seats below were pulled out as couches for two more. I did not at all like the idea of sharing a bed with a stranger, and for what seemed a long time on my first night the contact with an unknown bedmate kept me awake. My worry, however, could not have been really prolonged, for the noises of the morning awoke me to the discovery that I'd had a splendid night's sleep.

The bedmate, whom I had hardly looked at when we turned in together overnight, was, I found, a Canadian. He was not much older than myself, but he knew the ropes, and he offered to put me right on things. First of all, he examined my ticket, but his only comment was a grunt of satisfaction. Then he disappeared, and I saw no more of him for quite a while. In the interim the ticket inspector came along. He punched

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a section of my ticket—which, by the way, was about a yard long—and stuck a pink voucher in the band of my hat. When the inspector had disappeared my new friend came on the scene. Without a by-your-leave or any explanation he plucked the pink voucher from my hat-band and stuck it in his own. Later on we turned in.

In the middle of the night I was awakened by some one shaking me.

"Whassermarrer?" I suppose I asked.

"Where in hell's yer ticket?"

Sleepily I dug into my pocket and fished out the unhandy monster. The man examined it.

"Say," he went on, "where's yer slip?"

I had no idea what he meant, and said so. In a hurry, apparently, to get through his round he muttered a curse on a "damfool Englishman," placed a blue slip in my hat-band, and went on his way.

When the full light of morning broke I discovered that my bedmate also had a blue slip in his hat-band.

I had arranged to entertain my young Canadian friend at Calgary, but on our approach to that station he made another of the disappearances that mystified me. He did meet me as arranged, however, on the Calgary platform, and then I learned what his game was. I had been an unwitting accessory to a felony. The coloured slips that were put in the hat-bands were an expedient to avoid the awakening of passengers for the examination of the strip tickets, and they were changed at each divisional point. The collector simply reached over and removed one slip to replace it with another. My bedmate had travelled fifteen hundred miles on my ticket, and had jumped the train as she slowed down to enter the station.

Another experience on that journey sticks in my mind. A man who berthed in a bunk directly opposite mine on the other side of the carriage had been, I noticed, sticking to the whisky-bottle pretty well the whole of the journey. His muttering one night drew my attention, and I peered across at him cautiously through the join of my bunk curtains, to get

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the shock of my young life. The souse was sitting on the edge of his bunk with his legs dangling over the side, and in his hand was a large Colt revolver. That it was fully loaded I could see from the gleam of the bullet-noses in the chambers. The thing seemed to be pointing straight at me. I stuck my head out.

"Put that revolver away!" I said loudly. "It might go off!"

The man roared with laughter, and his bellowing woke every one in the carriage.

"I damn' well hope it will!" he shouted. "A lousy Chink's bin along an' pinched one of my boots. He's sure to come back for the other, an' when he does I'm lettin' daylight into his yellah belly!"

He was hugging a single boot, and from my bunk I could see that its fellow had fallen down under the lower berth. I jumped down, picked it up, and handed it to him.

"Here's your other boot!"

He gazed at it owlshly, then leered at me in drunken fashion.

"Good for you, sonny!" he bumbled.

He tucked the boot alongside its fellow, put his gun away, and reached in his pocket for his wallet. From this he extracted a dollar bill and handed it to me solemnly.

"Goo' nigh!" said he, and fell fast asleep.

§ iii

At Calgary, the beginning of my last lap, the deadly monotony of the run across the then uncultivated prairie-land was broken by a first sight of the Rockies. From the station platform, looking westward, I saw high up in the sky what I took to be fleecy clouds flushing to pearly pink in the first rays of the sun. But as I watched, fascinated, the glow increase in generous warmth of loveliness it came to me that the clouds that held it were oddly without motion. I turned to a man beside me for an explanation.

"Tops of the Rockies, chum," he said. "Sun's catching 'em

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just right. About eighty miles off, but a wonnerful sight, hey?"

I have seen the Rocky Mountains from many view-points and in all conditions, but my first distant sight of them is still my most vivid impression.

Twelve hours from Calgary saw me at the end of my immediate journey—at Strathcona, on the Saskatchewan river. Edmonton was on the other bank. Strathcona, when I landed there, presented scarcely a house to the view. I left my luggage in the cloakroom and set out to hunt for lodgings in the more promising Edmonton. At the farther end of the bridge was an hotel, quite unpretentious, but with the look of being clean. I pushed open the first door that came handy and found myself in what was obviously the bar, and in the presence of the oddest collection of men I had ever encountered. All wore strangely wide-brimmed hats and as strange clothing. All were drinking, some were smoking, and the residue were chewing. The chewers had brought expectoration to an art. Some one hailed me.

"Howdy, new chum?"

To one side was a sort of office, and I made for that.

"Are you the reception-clerk?" I asked the man in it, a rough-looking chap.

"I am and I ain't," he replied. "I'm the boss of this goddam joint."

I would have walked out then had I had the nerve.

"Could I have a room?" I managed to ask.

"Whar's your grips?" he queried. Then, as my incomprehension of the strange phrase showed in my face, he elucidated, "Yer dunnage—kit—whatever youse calls 'em."

"Oh!" said I, getting a glimmering. "I left my luggage at the station cloakroom—while I hunted for lodgings."

"Good enough fer me, chum," said the boss, now in friendly fashion. "You're on. Come and have a drink!"

I followed him across the room. He stepped behind the bar counter, picked up two glasses, and grabbed a bottle. There was no what-would-I-have about it. He simply poured out a

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couple of stiff jolts. One of them he pushed over to me, and he picked up the other.

"Here's how!" said he, and poured the liquor straight down his throat.

I tried to follow his example, but in a second I was gasping for breath, choking, spluttering, and spitting all at once, with tears streaming from my eyes. I felt as if I had gulped hot sulphur.

"What's this filthy muck?" I gasped as breath returned to me.

"Hooch, sonny, hooch!" the boss said blandly. "And if youse want to live good and well in this goddam country youse must git ter drink it like mother's milk."

"Have one with me," I suggested. "And ask your friends to have one too."

I made the suggestion as breezily as I could. I knew something of drinking etiquette even then, and I had, besides, an uncomfortable feeling that shooting might begin if I didn't follow the custom of the country.

In a moment the whole crew was around me, making much of me. I was bombarded with questions about the Old Country—'home' to several of them—and about where I came from and what folks I knew. I was quite unused to drinking, but I hadn't the nerve to back out from any of the succession of 'rounds' that came up. I don't know how long the session lasted.

With an effort I opened my eyes. I saw blue wall-paper. I didn't remember any blue wall-paper. I shut my eyes again and tried to think, but couldn't because my head was opening and closing like a concertina. Avoiding sight of the blue wall-paper that so destroyed recollection, I peered about me tentatively. I was lying on a small bed—whose I didn't know. My boots were beside it. My collar and tie were on a dressing-table. Odd! I didn't remember turning in.

It came to me then that I had at some time or other arrived at Strathcona Station. The point was, how long ago, or how recently? I crawled off the bed and gazed about me. My coat was hanging behind the door. I felt in the pockets. My

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wallet and all my money had gone. The shock of that discovery almost sobered me. My watch came to hand from my waistcoat-pocket. It said six o'clock, but was it morning or evening? Slowly I opened the door and peered about the passage outside. Nobody was stirring. There was a bathroom opposite. I made for that and splashed myself with cold water. It did me good. I returned to the bedroom, dressed, and went downstairs.

The first person I encountered was the man who had claimed to be the 'boss.' He greeted me with a smile.

"Well, new chum," he asked, "how d'youse feel?"

"Where's my money?" I blurted. "Where's my wallet? Where am I?"

He put a hand on my shoulder. "Sonny," he said, "youse passed out good and early this afternoon, so I put youse in yer room. Yer wallet and cash is locked up in the safe. I took the grips-check off you and sent Ike across to the deepo' to fetch 'em."

My period of unconsciousness had lasted only for the afternoon.

The boss was Dan MacIntyre, a real good fellow, as I was soon to discover. His kindness to me endured all the time I was in the North-west. If the "unco guid," shocked by that first liquorish adventure of mine, discover it odd that I can say Dan looked after me like a father I can only advise them to acquire some sense of proportion. Whatever kindness a decent man might have even for a youngster in those days in the North-west, it would never go the length of interference with personal liberty. Advice would be freely given—if sought. Apart from that, even a youngster such as I was then had to be responsible for his own actions. Nobody would think of teaching him, at least gratuitously, his way about. A fellow who was seeking his fortune in that rough life had to learn as he might to stand on his own feet. It was, in truth, a hard school, with hard knocks given and taken. One had to learn to play the cards as they were dealt. Life, in the North-west as in the Wolfville philosophy, wasn't "in holding a good hand, but in playing a pore hand well." And if a new

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chum, not more than a boy, thought to pit himself against succeeding rounds of hooch in the company of hardened drinkers—well, it was up to him. It was up to him just as much as it was if he sat in with his small stakes and inexperience to a game of poker with seasoned players. He had to learn for himself. Only the closest of friendship could excuse the impertinence of trying to teach him. But such callousness as may appear in this outlook was merely on the surface. The good loser, the man who showed he was profiting by experience, could always find some one to stake him for another chance. Like many another man, I found among these rough-shelled fellows more generosity and kindness than I later found among men who came from more civilized parts.

But I outran the course of my yarn. The discovery of the genuine qualities of the men and women I found myself among was progressive from the time of my arrival in the North-west until my leaving it. I only want now to repeat that old Dan MacIntyre was like a father to me, and I shall be glad if the thanks I offer him so tardily ever meet his eye.

§ iv

When, after a few days to get settled down, I went looking for a job I suddenly remembered the letter given me by the old settler on the *Celtic*. I hunted it out from among my belongings and showed it to Dan MacIntyre, asking him if he knew the man to whom I was recommended.

"Tom Fearly?" said Dan. "Sure I do, sonny. Comes to the hotel every morning. Next time I see him I'll point him out to youse."

"Is there plenty of work to be had?"

Dan cocked a leery eye at me. "You bet," he said significantly, "if youse don't mind what kind o' work."

Soon after noon on the following day Dan brought me to his side with a jerk of his head.

"Thar's your man, son," he said quietly. "Feller in the Stetson. Tackle 'm right now."

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If I'd had any hesitation about tackling the man indicated Dan's push towards the group he was standing with gave it no time to appear. I touched my quarry on the arm.

"Excuse me," said I, "but are you Mr Fearly?"

"Tom Fearly's the name, son," was the quite friendly reply. "What can I do for you?"

For answer I handed him the old settler's letter, which he read carefully.

"Can you drive team?" he asked.

Now, though I had been taught to ride while at school, the only driving I had ever done was with our milkman's float. Sometimes, like other boys, I would jump into that vehicle while its owner was delivering milk and drive it down our street. But, remembering Dan MacIntyre's advice, I promptly said, "Yes."

"Good enough," said Fearly. "Go down to the livery-barn, hitch up my team, and bring it here."

I hurried off. Passing Dan, I asked him *sotto voce* what was a livery-barn and where would I find the one mentioned.

"Just across the bridge. Stables," Dan informed me in a whisper. "Good luck!"

I found the place. There was a man at work inside. I called to him and asked which horses were Mr Fearly's.

"That's Tom's team in the last two boxes," he replied, without looking up. "Better look out what you do with them, chum," he added. "They ain't even town-broke."

On my telling him that I didn't grasp his meaning he stood up to have a good look at me.

"Say," he said, spitting out a piece of straw, "you're good an' green, ain't you? That team, let me tell you, ain't little better'n wild hosses. May be all right fer goddam perairies, but in a town"—spitting out more straw—"plumb dangerous!"

Masking something of dismay, I told him of my meeting with Fearly, and how much I needed the job. There would be a drink in it for him, I said, if he would show me how to harness the beasts and would hitch them to the wagon for me.

"Sure," he nodded. He reached for an armful of harness

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on a peg. "Come along an' watch me," said he; "but stand clear of them if you don't want to be kicked to kingdom come!"

A wickeder-looking pair of horses I have never seen before or since. One of the beasts showed the white of a baleful eye at me and lashed out with both vicious heels. It seemed to me that getting all that intricate harness on to the team would tax my straw-chewing friend, nonchalant though he was. It was a process I wanted to grasp in one showing. But he was too quick for me. In less than no time he had the harness fixed and was leading the team to a dilapidated box-wagon. He hitched the team to this and looked at me placidly. I climbed on to the wagon. It had no real seat—merely a plank laid from side to side. I sat down, and he cast up to me what he called the lines.

"O.K.?" he asked, still chewing.

"Yes, thanks," I said uncertainly.

He walked to the yard gate and flung it open. Then he came back and gave the nearside horse a resounding smack on the rump. We were off!

How we scraped through that narrow gate approaches the miraculous, and fortunately the team wheeled in the proper direction. As soon as they got into the road they set off at such a breakneck speed that I despaired of ever stopping them. When, however, they began to near the hotel they slackened pace, and they pulled up, more of their own volition than from my haul on the reins, outside the porch. Our arrival was greeted with howls of laughter from Dan, Fearly, and other men who had come out to see us turn up. I wondered if possibly my expression had betrayed me as half-way between "Good heavens!" and "Thank God!" for that, sure enough, was about the sum of my emotions; but there was another cause for mirth. My straw-chewing friend of the livery-barn—a licensed joker—had put the hames on back to front, just, I suppose, to make an idiot of me.

The harness being properly adjusted, Fearly climbed into the wagon and seated himself beside me on the plank. He told me to drive to the top of the hill, where he had a call

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to make. Our progress was fairly all right until we turned into Jasper, the main street, where the traffic was considerable. It seemed to me then that every other driver was on his wrong side and simply asking me to collide with him. The trouble was, of course, as Fearly ultimately spotted, that I was wanting to drive on the left in British fashion, while Canadian custom called for keeping to the right.

Disaster came as it so often does—suddenly.

A gust of wind picked up a large piece of paper from the middle of the road and blew it swirling under the noses of the team. What terrifying object the beasts made it out to be I don't know, but they got their bits between their teeths, shot out their necks, and bolted. I lay back on the reins with all my strength, the plank seat sliding under me, but all to no purpose. Then Fearly reached over and grabbed one of the reins.

"Slacken yours!" he yelled in my ear, and at the same moment gave a terrific jerk.

Up to a point the trick succeeded, for it got the bits back into a position of better control. But it threw the team round into a side-street. This was built up only on one side, with hummocky ground on the other. The wagon bounced over one of these hillocks, with the result that the plank seat was jerked from under us and we were chucked over the side. I was still hanging to the reins, and I had no sooner hit the ground than I was jerked to my feet again, to race alongside. Fearly was not so lucky. He hadn't been thrown clean out, for on finding the plank going from under him he had grabbed the side of the wagon. He was now hanging over the side by his knees, with his rump against the jagged and broken tyre of the old wagon-wheel. The rapidly revolving tyre was making sad havoc of his buttocks, and his yells of pain only served to frighten the horses still more.

The end came when the horses, out of all control, were brought to a standstill through getting on either side of a stout telegraph-pole. Then poor Fearly's grip relaxed, and he fell fainting and bloody to the ground. There was a shack near by, and to this I ran for help. The people in it pointed

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out that the Catholic Hospital was only a short way off. I made for this at once, and in very little time Fearly was in expert hands. The damage to his posterior was not as dangerous as it looked. Once he was snug in bed with his wounds dressed he gave me his home address and asked me to fetch his wife. Together we called on the invalid.

The whole affair ended in laughter, for Fearly was a sportsman. He put no blame on me, for he had seen on my arrival at the hotel that I could not drive. Indeed, he extracted from me the confession that I was handling a team for the first time, and he commended my intention of taking any job I could get. There was, he said, no better way of getting ahead in Canada, no better way of acquiring the self-reliance that was so necessary in that undeveloped country. While still in bed at the hospital he told me to call on his partner, who would give me a permanent job.

"Not as a teamster, though," said Fearly, with a grin. "Try time-keeping!"

III

EARLY DAYS IN A NORTH-WEST TOWN

I STAYED with Fearly and partner for some time, learning the life of the country. Edmonton in those days was a small town. The only buildings with any little claim to importance were in Jasper, the main street. The Hudson's Bay Store was the most outstanding. There were, I fancy, only the two hotels, the Yale and the Windsor.

Every now and then outfits would come in from the Far North, and the lads belonging to them would start setting the town alight. Things became warmest when men paid off from a lumber-camp came in. All those 'jacks' would blow into the bar of an hotel and chuck their pay-cheques—for as much as three hundred and fifty dollars apiece—over the counter.

"Stick it in the till, Dan, and let's know when I'm through."

That would be the beginning of a hell-fired jag lasting probably a fortnight. At the end of that time the bartender would inform his man, "You're through, Jack. Here's a bottle of hooch on the house. Beat it!"

And the man would take the bottle of whisky to 'taper off' with as he hit out for the woods again, there to spend five or six months earning another 'wad' to blow when he next hit the town.

As always in such outposts of empire, the male population greatly preponderated, and to cater for their sexual needs there was a red-light district, inhabited by ladies of more wit than virtue. The married women of the town accepted the situation with a placidity which might have astonished their stay-at-home sisters. They felt safer in the knowledge that there was such an outlet for the men who had lived for five months or more where continence was a necessity and dried apples a luxury.

One beautiful morning I was sitting on the veranda of

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Bernice's house chatting with a couple of surveyors who had just hit town. Dawn was breaking in a singularly beautiful sunrise. One of the girls came out in attire that was notably diaphanous.

"Bella," one of the men greeted her, "I'll bet you five dollars you won't ride that cow grazing in the field over there."

"I'll take that bet," said Bella promptly. "Come and give me a leg up."

Over to the field the group of us went. Rounding the beast up took some time, but at last she was secured, and Bella was hoisted on her back. One of the men stupidly slipped off the large handkerchief he had about his neck and made the girl's ankles fast with it under the cow's belly. Then the animal was set free.

The first thing it did was to charge into and through some bushes of very stiff growth. The only result was the complete removal of the lady's thin outer garment; then the cow, finding the objectionable burden still aboard, began to give a display of bucking never bettered by the most spirited broncho I have seen in an experience of many rodeos. This activity proving equally ineffectual, the cow made another rush through the shrubbery, from which the rider emerged like Lady Godiva.

The girl, by this time thoroughly frightened and shaken, was screaming to wager-layer and abettor to catch the cow and get her off; but this was easier said than done. Apart from the fact that the spectators were helpless with laughter, a completely infuriated and bewildered cow wants a lot of catching. It was not until the animal became too tired to dodge and practically gave itself up, so to speak, that the girl could be hoisted off. And what that scarred and angry girl called both wager-layer and his chump friend with the handkerchief would, if repeated, make the reader's hair stand up like quills upon a fretful porcupine. The prank cost them a good deal more than the five dollars, for it took some days at the local hospital to patch the girl up.

Almost the same company was responsible for a prank that filled the less sedate of the townsfolk with high glee. In

Edmonton, as elsewhere, Labour Day was set aside by the trade unions for demonstrating the dignity of labour by procession under the banners of the various societies, crafts, and guilds. There was a splendid muster on the day in question, and the organization of the whole business was in the hands of the Mayor, a man with no small notion of himself and his official dignity. The trade unionists were in full force. They congregated at the Town Hall, were lined up behind the town band, and started the parade in good style. The procession wound its way through the principal streets to the plaudits of enthusiastic citizens assembled from near and far. It was hooray for the bricklayers, hooray for the plumbers, hooray for the carpenters, hooray for this guild and that, until the very last item of the parade. The hoorays rather checked or faltered over the gaily bedecked carriage that brought up the rear, for the spectators did not quite gather what craft it represented. Most of the spectators, that is. Quite a number of the men on the sidewalks knew, however, and they grinned or guffawed according to their respective natures. For the occupants of the carriage were one of those larky surveyors and four of the ladies from the red-light district. The carriage had been kept in readiness behind the livery-stable, to join up to the tail of the procession just at that point in the progress where the addition would be most telling.

Perhaps the only person really annoyed about it was the Mayor. He said that the addition to the procession let the whole show down in dignity, that it was a scandal and an outrage.

"Outrage be damned!" said the unrepentant surveyor. "It gave the show the one touch that was wanted. The girls—well, where in town would you find better trade unionists?"

§ ii

At that time Strathcona was the rail-head. From here a great part of the gold rush of '98 took place. Of the many thousands that 'pulled out,' I was told, only eight reached the Klondike. They started out, those people, with the

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weirdest and most inadequate outfits, and apparently with not the slightest idea of the hardships that lay in front of them. There was one man I heard of who started off on the trail with his wife and a child of eight. What madness! What blind idiocy! Of this pathetic party I myself saw the graves four hundred miles or so out of Edmonton, when, as I shall tell later, I was on the Lone Star trail. Another man set off on a bicycle with bottles of meat-extract strapped on behind. An outfit of no more than a sugar-box on wheels—such as children play with in the streets of English towns—with a couple of dogs harnessed to it by string was a daily sight.

For those pitifully inexperienced and unteachable people, as for the hardened sourdoughs, Edmonton was the last link with civilization. Beyond lay a country that in winter was locked in ice and snow, and that in summer was little better than a swamp.

It was not that all perished on the trail. There were a few who returned with convincing evidences of potential wealth. I remember being buttonholed one day in Edmonton by a man who showed me three dirty-looking lumps of mineral that he insisted on my taking across to the assayer. The assayer set about examining and testing the lumps with glass, scales, and acids. His pronouncement, after the most scrupulous examination, was that they were pure platinum, and therefore of great value. This no more than seconded the prospector's own opinion. He told me that just south of the Peel river he had come upon a rich mine of the stuff. If I would stake him with an outfit, he said, he would take me to the spot. By raising five hundred dollars I could be half-owner of the mine. This was a proposition to which I gave serious consideration, but the prospector got drunk one night and was shot dead in a brawl. With him died my opportunity, for he took his secret with him.

I believe that there are in that country great mineral deposits of high value still awaiting discovery. But in those days the problem of transport was insuperable. I have myself seen, stretching for miles, great mounds of blue crystals that were unquestionably copper sulphate, and fields and fields of green

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crystals of iron pyrites. Those deposits, however, lay five hundred miles or more beyond the rail-head, and the cost of transport would have eaten away all profit. I have seen gold nuggets in the hands of Indians, and such nuggets exchanged for food and tobacco. But the Indians would never tell where the nuggets came from. I remember one fellow showing me a piece of pure copper as big as a duck's egg that he had picked up on the banks of the Peel river.

The thought of gold held men's thoughts waking and sleeping. The metal itself seemed to be everywhere. The gravel-works by the bridge that crossed the Saskatchewan from Strathcona to Edmonton washed out enough gold in cleaning the gravel to pay overhead expenses; and, indeed, a pan-handler could wash from two to five dollars' worth of gold a day from most rivers in that northern country. The glaciers that during the Ice Age had moved so inexorably across the continent left gold in all the river-beds, and Labrador, where those glaciers broke off for their journey southward, is considered to have immense possibilities as a gold-bearing country. From time to time expeditions have been organized to prospect that province, but as the land is 'open' for only two months in the year it is very difficult to work. Here the conquest of nature is still a task for modern invention.

With all the talk and thought of gold attracting, as it did, all sorts and conditions of men to Edmonton, it was inevitable that crooks in number were attracted too. One heard constantly of some mug or other being fleeced.

I knew two men who sold for ten thousand dollars a claim that was scarcely worth as many cents. Seeing those two fellows spending freely, I asked them if they had made a lucky strike. And, with a grin, one of them gave me the yarn. They had been washing for gold in a small creek when there descended on them a tenderfoot, who was out hunting. This innocent became interested in the process, and asked to be shown some results. Scenting a cash transaction, the pan-handlers 'salted' the wash. The innocent was impressed. He hastened back to civilization, and returned with the ten thousand dollars required. He had, however, some notion of

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being cautious, and he brought with him also a new set of pans. Before he parted with his money he wanted to see what a wash produced in those virgin receptacles. Never was a test accepted with more alacrity than this by the two crooks. The result of the washes with the new pans was simply amazing. So good, in fact, was the 'colour' that the money changed hands in less than an hour. The two rascals had never worked more than about three dollars a day from their claim, but they had a quantity of gold-dust in camp when the mug made his appearance. Both of them were tobacco-chewers, and before stepping into the creek with their pans to scoop up the mud and begin washing they filled the spaces between their lips and gums with gold-dust. As they chewed tobacco during the process of washing, what more natural than that they should spit into the pans?

It was not, however, merely in the finding of gold that money could be made in the North-west. Real estate was booming in Edmonton, and judicious buyers won fortunes. I did a bit of buying myself, but I cannot say I was judicious. I knew next to nothing about deeds, plots, or plans. A fellow approached me one day with what he called a 'cinch.' He had secured, he said, an option on two fine lots on Main Street, but he needed five hundred dollars to complete his side of the deal. If I would advance him the money half-shares of the profits would be mine. He hired a buggy and took me to the ground, bidding me check it with the plan. The name and numbers were identical, and all looked completely above-board. As security I was to keep the plans. Nothing could have sounded fairer.

From the bank I drew out five hundred dollars, my total savings to that date, handed them over, and was given the plans. A week or two after the transaction I went to call upon my partner at his hotel. I was informed that he had been suddenly called East. This piece of news caused me no uneasiness. Another five hundred was due at the end of the month, and that would certainly bring him on the spot.

The end of the month came, and my partner was still absent. His absence, in fact, continues to this day. I took the

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deeds along to the police and told them the whole course of events. They investigated, and they found that the deeds were quite in order. They were quite in order, not, unfortunately, for the two lots on Main Street, but for land some thirty miles away. The police showed me the exact spot on the map. There was thirty feet of lake-water on top of it.

§ iii

Wealth in the shape of cattle grazed on the prairies within riding distance of the town, and the cattle meant cowboys. Every now and then the cowboys would ride into town with a bunch of stock.

Standing in the bar of the hotel one evening, I heard the clatter of hoofs. Two cowboys were coming across the bridge with a drove of horses. When they had their animals safely collected in a convenient corral they came over to the saloon, called for drinks all round, and got into conversation with the regulars. They were taking the string of bronchos, they said, down into the States. Some one suggested a show of broncho-busting.

"Why, sure!" said one of the cowboys, and he threw his hat on the floor. "When I sees five dollars in that Stetson," he said, "I'll go across and break any broncho you like to choose from the string."

Dimes, quarters, and half-dollars were chucked into the hat until the sum required was more than covered. Then the cowboy stooped and picked up the hat. He crossed to the bar and poured the coins out on the counter.

"Say, bartender," he said to Dan MacIntyre, "jest you see that this goes to the Children's Hospital, will ya? Now, then"—he turned to the rest of us—"let's move to the corral."

Even to my inexperienced eyes the bronchos in the corral looked a vicious lot. One of the local men, considered to be a judge of horseflesh, was given the job of choosing the bronc that was to be tamed. He lingered over the choice, but finally picked out a big rawboned sorrel. The rest of the beasts were herded out of the corral, and the spectators took

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up positions for watching the show. Some of them climbed to the top of the high fence enclosing the corral, a bunch together. The sorrel entered an immediate objection. He trotted over to the improvised grandstand, wheeled, and lashed out with his hind-legs. The effect was startling and funny. The fence-sitters vanished as though wiped out. And it happened that the outer side of the fence was occupied by a midden, a good way from being empty. As one of the grinning bystanders remarked, "Results warn't too Oh dee Colognee!"

Into the corral came the cowboy, a finely built fellow about twenty years of age. On his left arm he carried his saddle, and in his right hand were lariat and quirt. His manner in setting about the job was cool to the point of indifference. He ran a slip-knot through a loop in the lariat and trailed it on the ground in front of the horse. The beast scented a fight from the beginning, and wheeled away each time the man approached. Then, unwarily, it put a foot into the loop. Next moment the rope was drawn tight, with the loop fast about the beast's fetlock. The bewilderment of the animal at finding itself so caught gave way to fear as a loop was thrown deftly over its neck. At a steady haul the caught foot was raised from the ground. Then the cowboy pulled himself hand over hand along the rope until his shoulder was against the horse's flank. A slight push and the beast toppled over.

It was done so quietly and easily that the horse did not seem to realize it was happening. Once down, however, it did everything it could to get up. What struck me then with surprise was the ease with which the cowboy kept the animal on the ground. He knelt lightly on its head and passed his kerchief over its eyes, then swiftly had the saddle across its back. Next the cinch rope was passed under the belly, and the saddle fixed as tightly as was possible. The cowboy's mate threw him a bridle. It is not, of course, an easy thing to bridle a wild horse, but this cowboy had very little trouble about it. He simply pinched the horse's nostrils until it opened its mouth, when he grasped the tongue and drew it out. Then the horse could not bring its teeth together without biting its tongue.

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All was now set for the struggle. The cowboy put his foot in a stirrup and drew the kerchief off the horse's eyes. The beast got to its feet, and as it rose the cowboy slipped his foot into the other stirrup. For a countable number of seconds man and beast stood motionless, as though carved; then the horse set about ridding itself of those maddening encumbrances. The bridle occupied it first. Whinnying with rage, it shook its head violently. Then, finding that useless, it turned its attention to the burden on its back.

With a squeal of rage it dropped its head between its forelegs, bunched together, and leaped high in the air, to land on the earth again with a thud that shook the ground. The maddening burden was in no way dislodged. Again and again the horse repeated the manœuvre, with the cruel quirt cutting into its hide each time it came back to earth. It tried a new dodge. This was a leap with a sideways twist of its rump in the air that brought its hindquarters down a yard or more away from where they shot up. The man was almost dislodged, and the saddle began to slip. As if it realized the partial success, the horse repeated the trick. But this time the cowboy was ready, and the cut he gave the horse when it came back to earth made it snort with pain.

By this time the cowboy was bleeding from nose and mouth. To the spectators it looked odds on that the horse would win. But the broncho-buster knew better. After the third twisting buck the horse gave up, and stood trembling in a lather of sweat. The whinny it emitted seemed to admit defeat. The cowboy smiled and reached forward to stroke the glistening neck, talking in a soothing way to the trembling animal. Then he dismounted and rubbed the quivering flanks with gentle, caressing hands. He took off the saddle and removed the bit from the sore mouth. He flung the bridle to his mate. With no more control of the horse than was provided by an ear between his fingers, he led it round and round the corral.

The two cowboys stayed three nights with us. The night before they left I asked the broncho-buster if the sorrel was still 'broken.' By way of answer he took me over to the corral,

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in the centre of which he seated himself on a box. The sorrel saw him from where it was in a bunch of horses and came towards him. The young fellow put a lump of sugar between his lips and threw his head back. The sorrel got behind him, reared up, and came down with its fore-legs over his shoulders and resting on his knees. Then the horse bent its head and took the sugar from between the cowboy's lips.

This young fellow had, he told me, a curious power over horses. The governor of a prison once had a horse that nobody was able to shoe. The cowboy heard of this and offered to try his hand. The governor said he would permit the cowboy to try only if every precaution was taken against his getting maimed. The young fellow said he would take precaution a-plenty, and on a chosen day the forge was got ready and he was shown the stall occupied by the horse. He opened the stable-door, went inside, and pulled the door to after him. The governor, watching, expected that the cowboy would come flying out, impelled by the horse's hoofs. Nothing of the sort happened. Some time elapsed, and then the door of the stall was opened and the young cowboy came out to lead a completely shod animal round the yard.

I asked the cowboy how he had contrived to succeed where so many had failed. Prior to entering the stall, he said, he had taken enough exercise to work up a good sweat. When he closed the door of the stable he passed his hand over his skin and held it under the horse's nose. The beast at once began to tremble, and from that moment he could do anything with it. The strong smell of a man, this young fellow asserted, would tame any horse.

I had been time-keeping for three months with Tom Fearly, and the job was beginning to pall. The need to wander was upon me again, and I argued that if I was going to let myself get into a rut in Edmonton I might as well have kotowed to the manager in my first job and have stopped in England. I had set out to see the world, but not so little of it as could be observed from behind a desk.

I put the idea to my friend Dan MacIntyre.

"I want to see more of this country, Dan," I explained. "I

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want to see the Peace river, Lake Athabasca, and the Arctic Circle. How do I go about it?"

Dan pondered the question.

"There's an outfit pullin' out for the Peace next week," he said at last. "Why not join up with that?"

"What as?"

Dan gave me a long glance. It held something of reproach.

"What did I tell yer first job youse went after?" he said.

"I remember," I replied. "I don't mind having a shot at any job, but what sort could I tackle with such an outfit?"

"Good and husky, ain't youse? What's the matter with swingin' an axe?"

"Never have swung an axe, Dan, but I don't see why I shouldn't."

"Good enough," said Dan. "Well, this is what youse got to do. The surveyor that's runnin' this party is puttin' up at the Windsor. Go and see him, son, and ask for a job on the line. He's sure to ask whar youse bin workin', and youse says Beaver Lake. There's lots o' big timber in that part. If he feels like signin' you on he'll offer forty a month an' all found. You don't take that, see? You sticks out for forty-five, and you'll land the job."

Good old Dan showed his knowledge of human nature when he handed out this advice. The idea of interviewing the surveyor put me in a state of funk, but that evening found me asking for him at the Windsor. I had to wait only a few minutes, then a young fellow appeared with a cheery smile and a hand outheld. He asked me what he could do for me. Unblushingly I got out the yarn Dan had primed me with, and it all worked out exactly as Dan had prophesied. The surveyor made me an offer of forty dollars a month, all found. This I turned down. I confess that I turned the offer down with my heart in my mouth, but Dan had been right. The surveyor fell for my suggestion of another five dollars, and told me to be at his barn at Forty-third Avenue the following Friday morning at six o'clock.

"Thanks," I managed to get out. "I'll be there."

As I departed the surveyor uttered something cryptic about

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"Six months and seventy-five." Before I could summon the wit to remember that asking for an explanation would look strange against my claim to experience he was gone.

Dan MacIntyre, however, interpreted. The outfit intended to stop six months in the bush, and seventy-five was the limit of weight in pounds allowed each man for gear and bedding. Dan could say, further, that as seventy-five pounds was the weight for one side of a pack-pony's saddle it was plain the outfit was going into the Far North. The trail would be followed as far as possible, then pack-ponies would be used for the less traversed country.

The next few days saw me in a state of hectic activity. Dan helped me with his advice and bought my gear for me. The most expensive items in my gear were two Hudson Bay blankets: "four-points" they were called. I was to appreciate their quality with thankfulness on nights when the thermometer registered fifty below.

At five-thirty on the Friday morning I was outside the barn. But, early as I was, two tough-looking guys had beaten me to it. They had flung their gear into the middle of the yard, and with an air of hardihood I slung mine with theirs. They strolled over to join me, and began to fire questions on where I had been and what I had done. I had a feeling that they doubted my veracity, and I was not a little scared that they would bowl me out and report on my effrontery to the boss. Nothing of that sort happened, however, and as I grew to know them on the trail they proved themselves good friends, always ready to help when my inexperience looked like making a fool of me. It was not until a long time later that I learned how Dan had gone out of his way to get in touch with those two, to tell them all about me, and to bid them keep a fatherly eye on me during the trip. But even now my ears burn when I remember the fabrications I trotted out for them that first morning, and realize how they must have smiled inwardly.

Towards the appointed hour the boss appeared. With a grin for me he went on to speak to the two men.

"Seen anything of Tommy?"

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"Not yet," was the reply from one of them; "and I doubt if he'll turn up."

"My God, we're sunk if he doesn't turn up!" said the boss. "What makes you think he'll quit?"

"He was on a hell-fired bender with young Wily all this week and the week before. Saw him in the St Elmo last night. He said he was through with cooking, and was off into the bush prospecting."

I knew the man they were discussing. Tommy had the reputation of being the best camp cook in all the North-west, and the boss who could engage him thought himself lucky. There is nothing like good grub for keeping the boys in an outfit happy and healthy. In the bush Tommy was of top value. He helped more than anybody in keeping his outfit together. But in town he was hopeless. He was so well known that in any bar he could 'put his face in the till.' Any bartender would give him credit, for Tommy always paid what he owed with interest. And this popularity was his bane.

After a minute or more of cogitation the boss turned to me.

"Know Tommy?"

"Sure," said I, rather proud of the fact.

"Teetotaller?"

"No."

"Well," said the boss, producing his wad and peeling off some notes, "here's twenty-five dollars. You'll have to stop behind and find Tommy and get drunk with him. When you've got him so tight that he passes out chuck him into the back of a buggy and drive him out along the St Albert trail until you come to the hospital. Pitch him on to the side of the trail there and stick a branch on top of him, so that we don't run over him. Then you drive back into town and set out to pick up the outfit again next day. I'll leave a cayuse saddled for you in the barn."

This was a pretty tough proposition for a youngster. But I did want to go with the outfit, and I was afraid that if I jibbed at the first orders given me the boss might well tell me I was fired. I saw, however, that I had some sort of chance. Tommy had been long enough on his bender to be pretty well shot

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away, and even with my small experience in booze-fighting I might easily put him under.

The boss had my gear put with that of the outfit, and I strolled along to the St Elmo. Sure enough, Tommy was in the bar, still drinking, and in close confabulation with the half-breed mentioned earlier—Wily. I went over casually to join them.

"Thought you were pulling out for the North to-day, Tommy?"

"No more damn' camp cooking for me, my buck," Tommy hiccuped, and he turned to the 'breed. "Me and Wily's goin' after the dust, ain't we?"

"You say so," replied the 'breed, non-committal, after the manner of his kind.

"What about me joining up with you?" I ventured.

"Have a drink," said Tommy, "and we'll talk it over."

This was just the opening I wanted. I don't think I need give details of the hooch contest. I was starting from about a furlong off the tape against a man who had done laps beyond reckoning. In the middle of the afternoon Tommy passed out. I had the buggy all in readiness, and I bundled him into it. I reached the spot on the trail, and there by the wayside I laid Tommy out with a huge branch of poplar over him. Then I drove back to town. I got in too late to think of following up the outfit that day, but next morning early I went to the barn and saddled the cayuse. As I lit out down Jasper I found something exhilaratingly dramatic in the fact that I was at last on the trail to the wide-flung North.

I caught up with the outfit at noon on the following day. It surprised me to find Tommy completely affable. As a fact, he had no recollection of what had happened to him. The boys, on the look-out for the broken branch on the trail-side, found Tommy just as I had left him, deep in alcoholic slumber. There was always the chance that on waking he would become obstreperous, and they lashed him on top of the wagon that carried the tents, where he finished his drunken sleep. Waking, he had made the air sulphurous with swearwords for a mile or two along the trail, until it was borne in upon him

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that nobody was going to release him. Then he had given up cursing for singing. By the time the outfit got to camping for the night Tommy was ready to do the best of his stuff with supper.

The odd thing about Tommy was that once he was away from town he never touched a drop of 'hard' liquor, but seemed rather to lose all taste for it. I quite expected that when Tommy got to know of my share in shanghaing him he would make things hot for me. But we became the best of friends, and he told me that in truth he was really glad to get away from town into the clean air of the bush again.

IV

ON THE TRAIL

THE outfit I had joined was headed north to survey a timber limit for the Government of the Dominion. It was not so much the talk of gold that had made me keen to join up as an urge to see the world. I had heard stories of vast prairie-land, six hundred miles to the North, which was out of the grip of winter weeks before Alberta. It was even said that sub-tropical plants grew there in the open, and men had come back with specimens of these in proof. To back the story still further there was the fact that the Indians drove their cattle into the North in winter. This was the Peace river country, and settlers were already taking up homesteads in it.

At that time, however, the comparative geniality of the Peace river climate in winter was still pretty much a matter of rumour. It was not grasped that the gradual drop in height of the Rockies as they stretched towards the Arctic gave the warm Chinook wind of the Pacific a chance to blow beneficence across those northern plains, giving them that milder temperature which it brought to British Columbia and Vancouver Island, but which, because of the intervening heights of the Rockies, it could not carry to places farther east in similar, and even more southerly, latitudes.

To negotiate the intervening six hundred miles from Edmonton one followed the Lone Star trail, and this was the trail my outfit used. It was this very trail that figured so tragically, as I have already said, in the great gold rush of '98. It was not, could not be, the best way to the Yukon. That was by Nome or Skagway. But in the frenzy for gold reason and all ideas of practicability were thrown aside. And then, it may be supposed, the vast numbers of the gold-seekers who sought to reach the Yukon by the Lone Star could not stake

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themselves to the trip right across Canada and the voyage by sea to the Alaskan Gulf.

One Sunday when our boss called a day's rest for man and beast I came on sad demonstration of the tragedy which overtook so many of those pitiable adventurers. We were camped just off the trail on the Onion Prairie, and I had strolled into the bush. I came on some traces of cutting, followed them, and found myself looking down on a green mound surrounded by a rough wooden fence. At the head of this mound a tree had been blazed, and across the blaze was written, in indelible pencil, "Sacred to the memory of a man, his wife, and child."

No more than that. It was a sad monument to folly, but only one, though perhaps the most pitiful, of the many unknown graves that dotted the length of the trail. I was a boy then, not quite twenty years of age, but those green mounds made a deep impression on me. It was hard enough, I saw, to negotiate the trail with a properly organized party using first-class equipment, and the picture of that sorry procession of bicycles loaded with beef-extract, sugar-boxes on wheels, lone figures stumbling along, and that pathetic trio, of which one was so small, remains in my mind poignantly to this day.

Seventeen days' trekking saw our outfit at the end of the road on which wagons could be used. From then on we had to rely on pack-ponies for transport, and it was at this point that we were joined by the six full-blooded Indians who were to have charge of the horses. All gear was taken from the wagons and set out on the ground in heaps, which ultimately were divided or made up to as near the weight of seventy-five pounds as could be contrived. Each pony had to carry two of these packs. They were wiry little cayuses, but very pot-bellied just then from being grass-fed all the summer. This was a condition that a few weeks on the trail distinctly altered. It was interesting to the tenderfoot I was to see the skill of the Indians, and the real sourdoughs, in fixing the ponies' packs. A saddle-blanket was first placed on the animal's back; then the pack-saddle was cinched on and loaded with the seventy-five pounds of gear on either side. On top of all this went a

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tarpaulin, to be fixed with a final hitch that bound the whole double pack. This final hitch is that known as the 'diamond,' and there is a trick about it that is not to be learned in one lesson. It takes a practised packer, in fact, to throw the 'diamond.' The last act of the process is the gripping of the rope by the packer in both hands, the planking of the foot solidly on the animal's flank, and a laying-on of the packer's weight until it seems that the cinch-rope must bury itself in the beast's belly. In the case of my first sight of the process with those pot-bellied cayuses I have to admit experiencing no little apprehension. But, apart from some breaking of wind, some dancing, and some tail-shaking, those little beasts took their place in the pack-train without fuss or apparent discomfort.

The first horse in the pack-train is always the old bell-mare. Her place seems to be one of honour, and, however biddable and good-tempered she may normally be, she is quick to resent what looks like an attempt to overtake her on the part of the other beasts. Her ears go back and she lashes out viciously at any usurper or upstart. And the order in which the whole pack-train is arranged at the start is strictly maintained throughout the journey.

On this trek, because some of the cayuses were not 'broke,' it was necessary for the sake of control to tie halter to tail in front all through the train when passing through a settlement. The appearance of anything mechanical was enough to scatter the train in panic.

At night-time the old mare was hobbled, and in the morning the clanging of her bell made her easy to find. Horses are gregarious of habit, and they are apt to crowd with an established leader, so that the finding of the bell-mare in the morning meant the easy finding of the lot.

Once in a way the horses would go back along the trail to a fancied feeding-ground, but in general, if there was food near by, they kept pretty well around camp.

Some of the cayuses had distinct characters. There was one little fellow who hated being packed, and gave all the trouble he could contrive. Once his pack was securely on him he

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would walk demurely enough along the trail until he saw what he considered a convenient tree. This he would suddenly charge, not head on, but in such a way that one of his side packs bumped terrifically. In his first exhibitions of this cunning he was carrying bags of flour, and the result was burst sacks and a great deal of spilling. His subsequent burdens consisted of old tent dunnage that no jolting could damage, but that in impact made him think again.

There was another horse that I'll swear had a sense of humour. His job was to carry the cook-stove, in the oven of which Tommy would stow lids and small kitchen impedimenta. The cayuse discovered that when he shook himself to be rid of flies a fine clamour resulted. He made a trick of stopping on the trail to shake himself, and it was obvious that the clatter he made delighted him thoroughly, for his neigh from curled lips had all the quality of laughter.

In course of time, and by the help of the two buddies I have mentioned, I got to know how to pack and throw the 'diamond' as well as the next man. I could pull my weight in the work of the trail. This was certainly hard enough, but I did not feel particularly happy when I heard the boss say we were nearly on our location. What he would say when I was first called upon to swing an axe I could hardly bear to contemplate.

There came the moment of test. On the morning when our trek ended he called me to him, gave me an axe-head and a hickory shaft, and bade me 'hang it' for him. Now, the fixing of an axe-head to its shaft may sound an easy matter, but in actual fact it is one that demands the skill of long practice. By watching my fellows use the axe on the trail as they cut firewood or made a path for the laden animals, and by trying my hand secretly, I had been made aware that there was more in axing than was at first blush apparent. I could not, with all the energy I might put into them, get my cuts anything like as deep as those experts made them. The secret lay in knowing how to make use of the cutting edge. And it was quite plain to me that 'hanging' an axe-head was an art. The boss, in fact, had called my bluff beautifully. There was nothing

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for it but to appeal to one of my buddies. I went in search of the one called Fred.

"My God!" he said, staring incredulously when I explained my predicament. "Don't you know?"

It wasn't only that, I told him. I had never really used an axe in my life. He could justly have given me away to the boss, of course, but that did not seem to occur to him. He declared that he wasn't certain whether to select "damn' cheek" or "fool pluck" to describe my presence in camp, and jerked his head in the direction of the tent.

"I'll show you how," he said.

I had guessed right. Hanging an axe-head was an art. It had to be set just right—the base of the axe properly in line with the handle, and the one joined with the other, so that when the whole implement was laid on a flat surface the centre of the bit and the centre of the handle would be the only two points in contact with that surface. The slightest askewness or deviation from real balance would be against the cutting efficiency of the edge.

§ ii

I am, perhaps, slightly ahead of my story. Before I arrived at having to hang the axe-head we had come to more or less permanent camp. When the boss had announced that morning at breakfast that we were almost at our destination he had sent a couple of men on ahead to select the camping-ground. From that time forward we would be spending at least a week in each camp, a prospect of comfort which the nightly pitching seldom offered, for as often as not there had been no time even to put up a tent.

About noon on the following day we came up to our advance guard. They had chosen for camp a small clearing in heavy bush, with a crystal stream chattering along one of its edges. There was plenty of pea-vine as food for the horses, and as soon as the pack-saddles were off and they had been given a brisk rub-down the animals were smacked off to roam at freedom, with the bell-mare in charge. They seemed glad

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to be loose, and I for one could sympathize with them. They had made from fifteen to seventeen miles each day over consistently rough going with their heavy packs, and it had exercised all the art of the packers to avoid giving them saddle sores.

Tents were pitched all about the clearing. There was one big one for use as a mess-tent, and a lot of smaller ones as sleeping-quarters. We carried no pegs or ridge-poles. These were cut *in situ*. As soon as a sleeping-tent was up a good dry tree was dropped and a log cut from it to fit across the tent. This, called the 'snorting-pole,' was laid on the ground and at a convenient distance from the back of the tent, and was pegged to prevent movement. Then from it to the back of the tent branches of fragrant balsam were strewn and interlaced criss-cross fashion, to provide what amounted to a spring mattress for the support of our sleeping-bags. With the comfort of springiness went the additional soporific of pine scent. Our sleeping-bags contained 'ticks,' open at one end, which we filled with dry leaves or grass.

Tommy, the cook, and a mate made furniture for the mess. For the legs of the table a spruce was felled and cut into four. For the table-top another tree was brought down and split with wedges, then axed into planks. It was a lesson in dexterity to see spring into being the fine dining-table that resulted. This and the other furniture showed a certain neophyte in camp what a great deal he had yet to learn.

The purpose of the survey outfit was to mark out a section of forest for lumber. It had come about this way. Some months before an Indian had drifted into town with word of fine timber in this particular district. Upon this an interested firm had sent a man, known as a 'cruiser,' to see if there was anything in the Indian's report. In those days most cruisers worked with slide-rules, but there were still some left of the older type whose methods were more primitive. The cruiser's job, of course, was to make an estimate of the timber available, and the older sort went about it in this fashion: He would walk away from a chosen tree, then lie down with a measured stick between his feet. From the ground he would

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look over the top of the stick to a point some way up the tree-trunk. Then he would pace the distance from where his eye had been to the bole of the tree, and by a system of calculation come to a very fair approximation indeed of how much paying timber the tree would yield.

In this case the cruiser had reported that the 'cut' would pay, and the firm interested had applied to the Canadian Government for permission to work the area. Hence the survey party. The area in which the lumber-jacks would later exercise the permit to cut had to be marked out.

Return we now to my instruction on how to 'hang' an axe-head. He had also shown me a point or two on the actual use of the implement, but I went back to the boss with a distinctly sunk feeling inside me.

The boss took me off with him into the virgin bush. He wanted to find a tying-on post that was somewhere in the neighbourhood. This was the point from which he had to begin his survey of the timber limit. The search occupied fully three hours, and then all we came upon were four pits about a mound, out of which projected an iron rod. On this were cabalistic signs that I in no wise understood. The boss casually bade me drop a couple of trees that were in the way of his taking a sight. Fortunately for me, the trees were poplars, which cut rather like cheese. My luck held also in the dropping of them, for it was at hazard rather than by judgment that I did not get them hung up, amateur fashion, in other trees. They dropped clear. The boss was busy trying to find the Pole star, again luckily, perhaps, and my lack of skill went unnoticed.

We went back to camp, and the boss gave orders that all hands were to be on the line next morning. The real work of the survey was about to begin, which meant that I would have to keep my place with axemen who had spent most of their lives in the bush.

§ iii

What was called the 'line' marked the boundaries of the area in which lumbering was to be permitted. They were

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defined by trees felled by the survey party. There was a distinct etiquette about the choice of trees for felling. They could not be taken or left simply at hazard. There was etiquette, again, in the routine on which the felling parties worked. Each man had to take his turn in cutting the selected trees on a method designed to direct their fall. Among heavy timber it is of first importance that each tree is cut in such a way as to let it fall clear. Miscalculation of the cut may readily lead to suspension of the falling tree among the branches of others, and to the need for felling three or four more before the first can be brought down properly.

Fortunately for me, I had a skilled and willing instructor in my friend Fred. The secret of getting a tree down accurately, he said, was held in the phrase of the lumber-jacks: "Where the chips fly there she falls." Two men undertake the felling of a tree, the one whose turn it is to direct the operation making his cut on the side towards the direction in which the tree is required to fall. At the first of his cuts the director sights from the bole along the lie of the chips, and if it seems to him that they are falling too closely in the direction of any near-by tree he shifts his stance accordingly. The cut on the fall side of the tree is a little lower than that on the other. There comes a moment when the two cuts back and front almost meet. Then the man directing the felling steps round towards the other side and shouts, "Tim . . . berrrr!" There is a final chop, and the tree comes crashing down. The sighting along the chips, of course, is a check which is done automatically. The real-class fellow has usually made sure of his line before he begins to cut, and could, as a test, drive a peg into the ground with the fall of his tree.

Thanks to Fred and other pals, I quickly learned to carry out my fair share of the cutting. Not, of course, without pains and penalties, and not without doing fool things through inexperience. I once left my hat and lunch on the ground while I helped in the felling of a big spruce. I heard the shout of "Timber!" I looked round just in time to see my property overlaid by the upper branches of a toppled balsam. The joke was on me, and my mates made the most

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of it. While they jeered and laughed I had to cut away all the upper branches of the balsam to recover my hat and grub. The thing was done on purpose, just to 'larn' me not to leave my stuff lying carelessly around.

My first two days on the line left me one complete ache. I ached so thoroughly all over that I imagined I had contracted rheumatism from sleeping on the ground. But Fred, to whom I complained of my aches and pains, assured me they were no more than the protest of unaccustomed muscles, and that they would soon wear off.

Fred was right. The aching stiffness passed in a day or two, and after a couple of weeks or so on the job I felt and acted like a seasoned woodsman. That confidence, born probably of pride in having learned my way about so quickly, was my undoing. I have only to look at my left foot, particularly when it is bare, to be reminded vividly of the consequences of that careless confidence. I had learned to put on an axe an edge as sharp as a razor's. I had the job one morning of felling a big spruce. With a glance to determine the line on which I should bring it down, I threw the axe into the tree-trunk with all my strength. The bit hit a rough knot and glanced off the bark, to land on my left foot. It happened so suddenly that all I felt was a sharp jolt, but when I looked down at my foot I saw that bright blood was welling over the top of my shoepack. A 'breed was making the second cut on the other side of the tree, and, missing the sound of my axe, he came round to see why I had stopped. One glance was enough to inform him what had happened, and in a jiffy he had me sitting on the turf with my leg up on a log. The axe was still in my foot, and before removing it he made a tourniquet with his kerchief above my knee, twisting it after the fashion of a Spanish windlass by means of a short stick. This stopped the bleeding almost at once.

The boss came along. He saw that walking was out of the question for me, so he sent the 'breed back to camp to fetch a pony. I started to ride into camp in the ordinary way, but the brushing of the long grass and the shrubs against my damaged toe brought unendurable pain. I did most of the

journey backside foremost. My friend Fred, who usually attended to injuries in the outfit, was too far away on the job to be summoned. Tommy, the cook, had to act in his stead. On my arrival in camp he fetched up at speed with a bowl of hot water and clean rags. He rapidly stripped off shoepack and sock and got to work. When he had cleaned up the mess I was able to see that I had split my big toe. By now it was throbbing with a burning sensation. I had visions of tetanus.

Well, the cutting of a big toe is no great matter. I record the incident only because of Tommy's interesting method of treating the wound. When he had thoroughly cleansed it with water he pulled a plug of 'blackstrap' tobacco from his pocket and began picking at it. In a moment or two he had neatly removed the entire outer leaf—the wrapping. This he carefully straightened out in his palm and fell to licking all over. When it was fairly running with saliva he clapped it on my toe and began bandaging.

"Take the damned thing off!" I yelled. "D'you want me to get blood-poisoning?" But Tommy merely grinned, said nothing, and carried on. When Fred came back to camp the following day I told him what had happened. He said, to my surprise, that it would be better to leave the dressing as it was. He would have a look at it in about a week's time.

For ten days I lay on my camp-bed unable to move. The little learning that is such a dangerous thing, according to the poet, helped to increase my sufferings. I thought of mortification, gangrene, and all sorts of things, and for the first few days I expected each night to be my last. But every morning brought better counsel. I had to admit that the pain was gradually vanishing and my foot becoming easier. At long last Fred came along.

"We'll have a look at it," said he. "It's had a chance to heal."

As he unwound his bandages my fears returned. I was afraid to look, for I quite expected to see a lump of festering flesh. To my delight, however, the wound had begun to heal beautifully—don't surgeons call it 'by first intention'?—and looked clean and wholesome. Fred said that a surgeon would

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have put in at least seven stitches. And, indeed, doctors who have seen the scar since say it is miraculous that such a gash should have healed without surgical treatment.

On a timber survey of this sort surveyors are paid by the mile, and the usual cut per day is from three to six miles, according to the nature of the country and the timber on it. Any bit of luck in increasing the length of a day's marking is welcome. We struck a patch of luck one day over something that looked like putting us well out of it, but perhaps that's an exaggeration. It looked, rather, as if we were in for a harder spell than usual when right across the 'line' we encountered a deep ravine. From one side to the other was something over a mile, but to cut down one side of that gully and up the other would have meant a great deal more than just over a mile's survey and labour on the flat. To put it another way, the boss would get paid for what appeared a mile on the map, while actually he would have his team at work over what might amount to two in actuality.

The boss turned to one of the Indians of the party and asked him if he thought he could take a picket and walk down one side of the ravine and up the other, keeping the direction of the line sufficiently the while to be directed where to plant the picket. The Indian took a glancing sight along the theodolite, nodded, and started off, picket in hand, down the ravine-side. He had, I ought to say, no notion of the kind of country he had to traverse.

We knew that the journey was bound to take the Indian some considerable time, so we got a fire going to sit round as we waited smoking.

About an hour passed. There came a hail from the other side. The boss jumped up and went to the theodolite. He turned it back to check on the line we had covered, then swung it about to the reverse point on the scale and peered through the telescope. He was amazed to find that the Indian was dead 'on line.' All he had to do was signal the Indian to stick the picket in, and then the outfit had only to follow the man's tracks across the ravine.

The Indian's feat may not appear a great one, but, as a

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matter of fact, it is of a kind that perhaps no civilized man could accomplish. For this sense of direction, though Indians have it as a sixth sense, is a thing that civilized man has almost completely lost. In support of this contention I can tell you of an actual experiment on this same trip.

We came one day to a frozen lake that was covered with snow, and, having in mind this Indian's feat at the ravine, I suggested to the boss that we should try out on this easy ground how far a man could go in a straight line. He agreed, and the theodolite was set up on the lakeshore. The boss made essay himself first, and set out across the snow in what he thought was a straight line. But in less than fifty yards he was bearing off to the left, and he came back. We swung the theodolite over fresh ground, and I had a go. But I had no more success than the boss. We shifted the instrument once again and called over an Indian. He did not immediately grasp what we wanted, but when we made him understand he did not even trouble to look through the telescope. He just stood in front of it, and when he got the word "Go!" he set off across the lake. When he had gone about half a mile he was still in line, with his footmarks as straight as though dotted along a ruler, and we called him back.

From these and later experiences with the Indians I find myself wondering whether the benefits of civilization really compensate man for the loss of natural instincts that the civilizing process seems to have entailed.

After the injury to my foot I found myself with another job in the outfit. During the time I had been laid up the boss did a lot of jeering at me for my axemanship. We were several hundreds of miles from civilization, so that he could not send me back, but he questioned very much whether I ought to be trusted again with edged tools. Soon after I was back on the 'line' again, however, we came to a big lake. The distance across it had to be ascertained before cutting could be properly carried on. The boss was fuming and fretting because the assistant engineer, one Frank Smith, was working on another section. He ran a base-line and turned two angles, then sat down moodily to work out the distance.

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I was watching the operation, and when he had finished I offered to check his calculation in the absence of Smith. Without the check work for the day would have to be given up. The boss took my offer sourly.

"What do you know about trigonometry?" he sneered.

"Not a great deal," I replied; "but let me have a go with your book."

He chucked the pad over. I told him half jokingly that he had better go and make sure his angles were right. The calculation took me only a few minutes.

"The distance across the lake," I announced, "is 3517 yards."

"Pretty good guesswork," snapped the boss. "You're only two hundred yards out!"

I had purposely taken great care with my working, so I offered to bet him ten dollars that I was right. He took me up on that, and we went over the calculations together. My figuring was correct. The boss stared at me thoughtfully for a moment or two.

"I'll give you the ten bucks when we get back to camp," he said. "But it occurs to me, young fellow, that you'd be a dern' sight more useful working in my tent than messing around chopping hunks off yourself with an axe."

"Good enough," I replied; "but not at forty-five dollars a month."

"You don't lack nerve, b' gosh!" said he. "How much do you want?"

"Sixty."

"You can have it," said the boss. "You're promoted to assistant topographer, and you can work with Smith on that side."

The liking for mathematics caned into me by the blacksmith's son thus began to pay dividends.

V

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THERE were qualities in the men I found myself among, rough characters though some of them might be, that even now I would give a lot to possess myself. I don't mean simply the skill they brought to their job, their craft of woodsmanship; I mean qualities of character. They stood on their own feet, would fight for their rights at any time, or only at the dropping of a hat, so to speak. And, though they expected others to do the like, in most of them there was a deep-seated, a genuine, humankindness and charity of mind which warmed one's heart to them. They were, indeed, an interesting lot of men.

Tommy Farrow, the camp cook, was a Lancashire lad who had spent most of his life in the North-west. As I have already said, he had a reputation for his cooking which would have got him a job on any outfit. The meals he put on the mess-table with the limited supplies at hand were wonderful. His cooking apparatus, or bakery, was of the simplest, but the bread he made was as sweet and crisp as any that town bakers produce. His motto was "Cleanliness," and in his own territory he saw that it was strictly enforced. The bulk of the men chewed tobacco, and it was rare for one of them not to have the spitting habit. But there was certain trouble for a man who forgot himself and spat in the cook-tent. Tommy's rage would be terrific. He would swell up like a turkey-cock, and, becoming as purple as a gobbler's comb, would curse the offender, his ancestors, and his posterity and order him out of the tent.

He could not abide Indians in his domain. Four once invaded it, and it was clear that they could not be apprised of their obnoxiousness. Tommy said nothing, but the Indians had not been long in the tent before they were hurrying out

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of it, coughing and spluttering, with tears streaming down their cheeks. Tommy had simply sprinkled the top of the hot stove generously with red pepper.

The staple food on trail was the 'three b's'—bannock, bacon, and beans. It might well have been that the strenuous work and the life in the open air gave an appetite that would have faced anything. I don't know. But I have heard of cooks being run out of lumber-camps, and rumours of the particularity of lumber-jacks over their grub. At all events, nobody ever seemed to tire of Tommy's pork and beans. My mouth waters still when I think of them. This was his method of preparation: He would cover the bottom of a pot with a layer of fat pork; then would come a thick layer of beans. On that came another layer of pork, followed by one of beans, and so on, until the pot was three-quarters full. On top would go a cup of molasses with sufficient water to swell the beans thoroughly. With the lid tightly fitted the pot would be set deep in hot ashes and left all night. In the morning—oh, boy!—what a breakfast! The salt of the pork blended with the acid sweetness of the molasses; the beans became saturated to the ultimate grain with goodness, each grain swelling out to flouriness; and the pork, gaining something indescribable from molasses and bean essence, melted in the mouth. Ah, Tommy!

My friend Fred Yardley was another Englishman. The roughness of manner and speech in him was a pretence, for he was extremely well educated. It was through an accident with an axe, other than my own toe-cutting exploit, that I first got a hint of his past life. An Indian tripped over a guy-rope one morning and about prised his knee-cap off by falling on the bit of his axe. His yell reached Fred and myself, and we went out to see what was the matter. Fred had one look at the gash in the Indian's leg, then darted back into his tent, to come out again with a small leather case. It contained a set of surgical instruments. Anybody, of course, might have provided himself with the like, having money enough, but it was patent that the skill in those fingers at the end of the bare brown arms was not acquired casually in tending injuries

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in the bush. When the friendship between Fred and myself was firmly growing he told me his story. He had been, indeed, a surgeon of some distinction, practising in Harley Street. But a patient of his, a Society woman, died under his hands. There was an investigation, Fred's name was removed from the register, and he went to prison. When he had served his term he made for Canada, there to bury his name and his disgrace, and to place his fine attainments at the service of men on the fringes of civilization.

Then there was Billy Dawson. Poor Billy, he talked in his sleep. Many a night I had lain awake and heard Billy re-enact a terrible domestic drama, with the word 'murderer' repeated again and again. Then one day, from among some packing, an American paper months old came to light. On its front page there was a picture of Billy and the announcement of a thousand dollars' reward for information that would lead to his capture. Pretty nearly every soul in camp saw that photograph and announcement, but none mentioned it to the man concerned. Billy was a quiet fellow, but a first-class camp-mate, and though a thousand dollars must have been a great temptation to some none of his fellows could have looked the world in the face again if they had betrayed him.

A lovable character was old Jim Mitchell, a foundling. He had been picked up as a baby in a Brixton churchyard, sent to the workhouse, and taken, when old enough, to a Dr Barnardo's home. At the age of fourteen he had been sent out to Canada, and from then on had earned his own living. There was not a soul in the world, as far as he knew, that he could call kin. If there is truth in the definition of a gentleman as "one who has consideration for the feelings of others," then Jim was a great one. He was gifted with a very fine tenor voice and a sense of drama. On Saturday nights there was always a sing-song, and invariably Jim was called upon to give us *Young Monroe*. This was a ballad of never-ending appeal in all the lumber-camps of the North-west, and Jim Mitchell, with his perfect pitch, had a way of singing it that could make most old-timers blink to the point of having to pretend to blow their noses. Neither rhyme and scansion nor the

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words of the ditty are likely to appeal to the critical, but the ballad may be worth recording as somehow typical of those that got the old-timers under the ribs as they sat round the camp-fire, a dot of illumination in the vast dark of the silent Canadian night. It tells how a young lumber-jack lost his life with five others in trying to break a river 'jam' of logs.

'Twas on a Sunday morning in the spring-time of the year;
The logs were piled up mountains high, we could not keep
them clear;
When the boss cried out, "Turn out, my boys, without a
doubt or fear,
To break the jam on Gerry's Rock and for Saginaw Town to
steer."

Now, some of them were willing, but others did not like
To work upon a Sunday: they did not think it right.
But five of them had volunteered, and they prepared to go
And break the jam on Gerry's Rock with the foreman, Young
Monroe.

They'd scarcely rolled off many logs when the boss to them
did say,
"You'd better be on your guard, my boys, for the jam will
soon give way!"
He scarce the words had spoken when the jam did quickly go,
And washed away our five brave boys and the foreman,
Young Monroe.

The boss, he rushed back to the camp, and when they the sad
news did hear
They grabbed their peavies, pikes, and hooks and to the
bank did steer.
And up and down in frantic haste the boys did quickly go,
But bruised and battered on the bank was the form of Young
Monroe.

There are, of course, as with most ballads of the kind, a much greater number of verses than the four quoted. And again, as with most ballads of the kind, it deals with an actual happening. The fate of Young Monroe and his mates might easily be the fate of the men who called for the song, and this was no doubt the reason for its appeal to them. The ballad, even in my time, had become almost a folk-song, never set down in print either as to words or music, but simply passed by word of mouth from camp to camp, being altered and taking colour from the personalities of the various singers.

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Ben Duclos was a French-Canadian who stood well over six feet in height. He was one of the cheeriest souls it has ever been my fortune to encounter, his happiness resulting from magnificent health and a splendid physique that it seemed impossible to tire. On many a Sunday morning, after a week of gruelling labour, I have seen Ben dash naked from his tent, yelling with sheer animal spirits, and fall to wrestling with a tree. He would leap up, seize the top of a young spruce, and try to tear it from the ground. Usually the young tree selected would be so balanced in strength against Ben's that on straightening it would lift him off his feet high into the air. But the struggle would go on until Ben had the sapling wrenched from the soil. And then he would stand grinning, his body dripping with sweat, with the tree in his hand.

Ben was a splendid axeman, and it was he who taught me to put an edge on my axe. It was a common sight, but at first an astonishing one, to see a demonstration of how sharp those heavy four-pound axes could be made. If a man hadn't his knife at hand for cutting his plug tobacco he would use his axe. And it did the trick quite as well, if not better. But I think Ben could put a better edge on an axe than anyone. I remember one Sunday morning commenting to him on the sharpness of a bit. I wondered if it would be possible to shave with it. Ben took me up on the matter. He lathered me and shaved me with his axe, leaving my chin as smooth as ever a barber has got it with a stropped razor.

While writing of the sharpness of those axes I might mention a rather horrifying feat that Ben, in common with most of my camp-mates, could do with apparent ease, but that I never dared to attempt. This was to hold the axe upright by one hand at arm's length by the extreme end of the handle, the edge of the bit facing towards them, to lower the bit slowly until it touched their lips, and to bring it slowly erect again. The slightest slip, of course, would have meant a terrible gash.

Harry Bendorf I began by disliking thoroughly. He was a German Jew who could neither read nor write, and whose

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table manners were revolting. But his heart was as big as his head, and he taught me a lesson that I have never forgotten—namely, never judge a man's kindness or goodness by one's own feelings towards him.

On my way back to camp one evening I lost my direction and wandered about until dark. I decided then to make a fire and wait until dawn. I was wandering around collecting enough dry wood to keep my fire going during the night when I heard a hail. I answered it, and made in the direction from which it had sounded. Presently I came in sight of a light which was flitting among the trees like a will-o'-the-wisp. Bendorf was carrying it. He had fixed an empty tin sideways to the top of a pole, stuck a lighted candle inside and a piece of white paper over the mouth, and with this improvised lantern had come in search of me.

"Jack," he said as he seized my hand, "I'm damn' glad to find yer. Ven the poys told me you vasn't in camp, you bein' still a bit green, I choost couldn't sleep. I 'ad to come out an' look for yer! "

There were other men in the camp whom I considered to be my pals, but my being lost seemed to have caused them no concern. It had to be the fellow I had always treated with contempt who cared enough for me to leave sleep and a warm camp in order to bring me in.

§ ii

My first real contact with the Indians was when the six full-bloods came to join the outfit at the end of the wagon-trail. They were an aloof sort of men, and seemed to resent in the beginning any attempt to make friends with them. But as the days passed their reserve thawed, and they allowed me to help with the ponies. I was to develop a closer intimacy with the Redskin later, but from the first I found him deeply interesting. This was before the time when all Indians were placed in reservations, and often as we worked in the foothills one or more would visit camp, or we would run into a settlement.

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I have told already of their abiding sense of direction, but another thing that struck me about them was their hardihood. They seemed to have an actual insensibility to pain. I give an example of this now, though in point of time it should come much later in my yarning.

Another white man and myself were travelling in summer with an Indian as guide. We were travelling light—bedding down nightly in no more than our horse blankets round a camp-fire. In the morning our Indian would get up first, boil a billy, and make tea. One morning I saw him rouse himself and start off to the creek with the billy, but after a few paces he dropped and began to examine his heel. It was all charred. In his sleep he had rolled over, and his heel had fallen among the hot embers. It was clear that the burning had gone on for some time, but it had not wakened him. It was only when he began to walk that he discovered something was wrong.

One winter morning, to give still another instance, I was walking along a frozen river when I ran across an Indian and his son out after deer. I gave them "How?" and went on. Hours later, at night, I again met them. They were dragging a fine young buck along the ice. As I was congratulating them on their good hunting I noticed that the elder one, who was carrying something in his hand, had injured an eye. I asked him what he had in his hand, and he showed me. It was his eye. In tracking the deer through the forest he had run into a small tree-branch end on and had gouged the eye out. He didn't seem to fuss about the matter much, unless it can be called fussy to carry the eye back with him to camp.

The hardihood of the Indian, however, seems to extend only to the withstanding of fatigue and exposure and the unfussy bearing of external injuries. In a sickness of which the causes are not patent they are like other humans, except in the fact that they are apathetic and secretive. In sickness they would much rather rely on their own medicine-man than trust the white man's doctor. It was only because I had gone out of my way to gain the confidence of the Indians in our outfit that I came into the affair concerning one known as young Noel.

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One morning as we made our way to the line the boss asked me if young Noel was ill. He had not seen him cutting lately. It struck me also that I had seen nothing of this Indian on the line for some days, and I promised I'd visit the Indian tent that evening.

This I did. Young Noel was lying in the darkness of the tent stretched on his bed. To begin with, he would say nothing about his condition, but finally he confided in me that he was afraid he would be of no more use in camp. On the previous Sunday, while he was out hunting, his horse had slipped and fallen with him into a creek. Noel said he had great pains inside him, and he could not stand. His home, he told me, was at Shining Bank Lake, twenty-three miles to the north-west of the survey camp. He felt that he had better make for it.

When I reported the matter to the boss he suggested that I should convey Noel to his home on the first fine day, provided the lad thought he could give me direction. There was no trail. When I carried this idea to the young Indian he cheered up finely. He said there wouldn't be any difficulty at all, because he knew the country perfectly. It was therefore arranged that we should take two cayuses, a day's grub, and start first chance. If possible I was to bring back another Indian to take Noel's place.

It was a really lovely morning when we set out for Shining Bank Lake, a halcyon day of summer. Tall pines providing shade and a carpet of needles made the first section of the journey easy going, and one of sheer delight. I called the midday halt, and while Noel set about making a fire I hobbled the horses, filled the billy, and unpacked our grub. The billy boiled, and we had our noontide meal in good enough style. Then came the customary rest, with sleep or a smoke, which one indulges in on such a trek. But I noticed that Noel had wrapped himself in his blanket, and I asked him if he was feeling cold. He didn't answer, and I gathered that he was in pain.

An hour passed. I thought it was time to get on the trek again. As I began to pack I called to Noel to saddle up the

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cayuses that were peacefully browsing among the pea-vines. There was no answer from him, and I gave him a real yell. Still there was no response. This rather scared me. I went over to him, spoke to him sharply, and shook him by the shoulder. He gave a groan, and I turned him over on to his back. Then I was thoroughly alarmed. The young fellow was not merely unconscious; he looked nearly dead. I dashed down to the near-by creek for some cold water to bathe his head, but with everything I could do it was well over an hour before he could speak. He told me he was in such pain that he could not possibly move.

It may be conceived in what a fix I found myself. We had made about twelve miles out of camp, which meant that Noel's home was only about eleven miles ahead of us. Getting him to his own people seemed the sensible thing to do, so I made up my mind to attempt making it. Mounting his horse proved impossible for the poor chap, so I got him across the saddle and bade him hold on by the cinch-rope. I mounted, and we started off. There was, as I have said, no trail. Foolishly I had relied altogether on Noel, and had not marked our direction. And now the poor lad was so ill that I could get nothing coherent out of him.

Night came on, and I saw that it was useless trying to continue the journey. I got Noel off and unsaddled and hobbled the ponies. I propped my companion up against a big spruce, collected as much dry wood as I could find, and lit a fire beside him. Then I settled down to pass the most miserable night, as it proved, I have ever gone through in my life.

It is most uncanny, I can tell you, spending a night in the bush. It is uncanny enough when one is solitary, but with the added anxiety of having a sick Indian on my hands that night was phantasmagoric. At that time of year bear, mink, lynx, and other animals were on the prowl. Ordinarily, in the still of the night it is startling enough for the comparatively inexperienced to hear a crackling in the bush, the swish of branches being pushed aside, and to see, reflecting the glow of the fire, eyes peering at one with a lambent intentness.

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True, all that is needed is the chucking of a lighted ember to make the eyes vanish, animals being afraid of fire, but I'll swear that I had my fill of apprehensions that night.

Day broke at long last, not without relief to me, and I set about boiling the billy. The food was finished, but there was a trifle of tea left. I hoped that the night's rest would have put Noel right, and that a steaming cup of tea would get him into some trim for the journey. But he was nearly in a coma. I believed he was going to die. All that day we wandered in what I thought was the right direction. The ground began to rise slowly. I fancied that possibly on the other side of a distant ridge we would come to Shining Bank Lake and the Indian encampment. I began to feel the pangs of hunger. Light-headed, I was stumbling forward. We had made, I reckoned, about three miles, but whether in the right direction or not I was beyond deciding, when night closed over us. With the coming of the dark the hunger left me, and I felt curiously fit and clear-headed. I made up my mind that with the dawn I would leave Noel and the ponies and make my way to the top of the ridge to spy out the land.

Light faded. I had seen that the horses were enjoying their feed. What was good enough for them, I thought, might put some life into myself and patient. So I collected tender shoots of the pea-vine and boiled them up into a thick broth. When, however, I tried to force some of the broth between Noel's lips he made as if to grab the pannikin and chuck it away. If I'd had the sense I should have seen that he was trying to tell me I had brewed poison. But I was too hungry, it may be, to want to understand, and I sat down to eat the muck.

Half an hour later I was fit to lie down beside Noel and die. I had the most violent puking, with excruciating pains in the belly.

When I could at last shake off the sickness I set out to make for the top of the ridge. I got there somehow, only to discover myself in bush so thick that I couldn't see any distance worth talking about in any direction. There were, however, some jack-pines on the ridge-top, and I contrived to climb one

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of these. I got high enough to see over the thick bush, and there, stretching in front of me, lay Shining Bank Lake, with blue smoke rising from Indian tepees on its shore.

Next thing I remember of the episode is an old Indian squaw trying to get milk between my clenched teeth. I had hardly a stitch of clothing left on me; the skin was off my palms and wrists, and my face was most woefully scratched. I was in a tepee, it seems, into which I had stumbled almost unconscious, and the old squaw was trying to revive me, while some of the bucks stood round. I must have been unconscious, because, try as I may to this day, I cannot remember getting down the jack-pine or anything of my battle through the bush to the lakeside.

Suddenly I remembered what I was doing there.

"*Nichtow!*" I cried, pointing back on the trail. "*Nichtow! Nichtow!*"

That is the Cree word for 'brother.' Between that and my gestures the bucks soon grasped the position. They had no difficulty in following my trail, and the breakage of tree and shrub in my downhill struggle must have made the way easier for them. In a very short time they got to Noel and brought him back into their encampment.

By curious chance the tepee I had stumbled into was that of Noel's mother. When she saw that it was her own son I had brought home she made a great fuss of me. It did not take me long to recover enough to tuck into a welcome meal of whitefish with molasses as sauce.

The next morning some of the Indians set out back on our trail to look for the cayuses, but they found only one. Then three of us, myself and two Indians, started off for the survey camp. Our appearance was a relief to the boss, for the missing horse had made its way back to camp, and he was on the point of getting up a search-party to look for us, thinking we had met with disaster.

The two Indians I brought back with me were brothers of Noel, and they were useful additions to the outfit. Like many of their tribe, they were splendid with the axe, and were naturally expert woodsmen.

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As for poor Noel, his father got him out of the bush far enough to get a box-wagon fixed up for him with a bed of hay, in which he was carried down the trail some hundred and ten miles to the nearest hospital. We heard later that the fall had given him double hernia. Lying on his back in camp had eased it, and this had misled him into considering himself fit for the twenty-odd miles' trek to his home. But, of course, the ride of the first forenoon brought back all the worst of the rupture symptoms.

§ iii

One interesting side of life in the bush is the opportunity I had of frequently seeing wild animals in their native state. Although I have acknowledged the eerie feeling that comes from being visited by animals while camping out alone at night, I am convinced of this, that most wild animals are not ill-natured or aggressive towards mankind. If they are let alone they will leave man alone. This does not apply, obviously, to the wolf-pack or to beasts driven mad by hunger. But the ordinary forest creature is quite peace-loving unless hunted.

Bears are the least shy of the animals I have seen in the North-west. As a matter of fact, I took the first cinnamon bear I saw to be a tame one. I was talking in the cook-tent one day to friend Tommy when a curious ripping sound came to my ears. Tommy put his fingers to his lip to enjoin silence, and motioned to me to peer round the tent-flap. Sitting up on its haunches outside was a large cinnamon bear, big enough to fill a dining-room doorway. He had an empty syrup tin held to him, and the sound I had heard was the ripping of claws in the tin to tear it open. Tommy had known at once what the sound was. The bear was absorbed in wiping his paw round the inside of the tin and licking the syrup from it. For quite a long time we watched the big fellow. When he had thoroughly cleaned the tin he looked round for another. Finding none, he ambled off into the bush.

One night I had a scare of an odd sort. I was making my

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way back to camp through the forest when I heard the crackling of twigs that heralded the approach of some one or something towards me. I turned to peer, and I saw coming my way a Polar bear. I had thought until then that Polar bears never of their free will left the snow-line, and I had read or heard that the species was very vicious. As quickly as I could do so I shinned up the nearest tree and watched him come on. That he scented me was evident, for he came to the foot of the tree and clawed at the bark. I don't know whether he saw me or not, but, anyhow, after he had clawed three or four times down the bark he wandered off.

Then I noticed an odd thing: he was leaving a distinct trail of white behind him! He was, moreover, rather small for a Polar bear, now that I took less scared notice of him. Once he was out of sight I slid to the ground again and had a look at the white trail. It surprised me to identify it as flour. Out of curiosity I followed back on the flour trail, and it was not long before I had got to the heart of the mystery. The cook had decided that day to shift camp, and was going to move six miles farther along the creek. As an advance shift of stores he had taken four sacks of flour ahead, tied them together, and, knowing that bears were about, had suspended them on a tree-branch out of harm's way, as he imagined. Mr Bear had turned up, found an interest in the flour-bags, and had apparently swarmed up the tree-trunk to try reaching them with his paw. Failing in this manœuvre, he had walked gingerly along the branch. Somehow or another, either by getting down on the bags and bursting the bottoms or by some other daft trick, he had contrived to come down with a cloud of about four hundred pounds of the best white flour about him.

Another night I was getting back to camp with Ben Duclos, and we happened on a bear den. We had only our axes with us, and Ben jabbed the shaft of his into the hole.

"Let's see," says he, "if there's anybody home."

The handle-end prodded something yielding, and Ben told me to stand by with my axe while he did fire magic. He peeled off a piece of birch bark, lighted it thoroughly, and

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threw it into the den. A second or two later, spitting and spluttering, there tumbled out a pair of little cubs no bigger than a child's teddy-bear.

Immediately Ben decided that they were to be taken back to camp.

"We'll keep 'em for pets," said he.

So I collared one and Ben the other, and off we went. The little chaps did not like being taken away from home one bit, and they filled the air with their squealing.

As we came close to the camp we saw Tommy, rifle in hand, at the edge of the clearing, manifesting no little agitation. When we got close enough he let us have it full blast.

"Blast you for a couple of goddam fools!" he said. "Haven't you got *any* sense at all? I've been listening to the squeals of those cubs for as good as half an hour—noise enough to bring any bear within five miles after you at the gallop! Don't you know, you half-wits, that if Ma Bear had come up on you you'd have been in for one hell of a ruckus, you with her two cubs? As it is," he finished, "it's dollars to dimes that she'll turn up ramping yet!"

When he heard that we proposed to keep the little things he had us put logs all round our tent and sit up the night, gun across our knees, playing poker.

We really should have known better, Canadian-born Ben especially, than to have robbed the mother of her young, for the deprived she-bear, if she had got on to us, would have been fighting mad and beyond telling dangerous. As it was, nothing happened. But next morning an Indian walked into camp with the offer of bear-meat in barter for tobacco and flour. He said that he had trapped a big cinnamon she-bear overnight in a deadfall. There was no doubt, fortunately for Ben and me, that this was the mother of the cubs we had stolen, and that they were already orphans when we picked them up.

Ben and myself had to give up our tinned-milk ration for the feeding of the little beggars, who grew with surprising quickness. Within a couple of months they were so big and bulky and so full of mischief that they were a perfect nuisance

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in camp. With their sharp claws they were for ever ripping open sacks of beans and flour, so that Ben was driven into fashioning leather mitts for them, which he had to put on their paws every morning before allowing them their liberty.

It would have been stupidly cruel to have set those orphans free to roam the forest, for they had never been taught by their parents to fend for themselves, so we sent word to the Canadian Government that we had a couple of cinnamon-bear cubs that we wanted to present to the National Park. The last report we heard of our pets was that they were delighting children with their antics and getting singularly rotund on buns.

There is some support for my belief that such creatures are harmless unless attacked or made mad by hunger in an incident that involved Billy Bryson and myself one day. We were crossing a muskeg swamp, using tufts and hillocks as stepping-stones. On either side of our route the muskeg was of such a kind that stepping into it would have meant sinking to our armpits—or farther. It is said, indeed, that this muskeg is merely a surface growth on deep lakes, and that to break through it is to be sucked down beyond any recovery. Billy and I were nearing the edge of the swamp, he in the lead, when suddenly he stopped and caught my attention in a whisper. Sitting on the trail was a large black bear, deeply engaged in scooping frogs out of the slush and eating them. Its presence meant either going all the way back across the swamp or risking the too unattractive danger of being bogged.

I was all for the safe course of going back over the trail, but Billy was of quite another mind.

"Hold my axe, Jack," said he. "I'll turn the black son-of-a-gun off all right!"

With that he plucked tufts of dry grass off the hillocks until he had a good handful. He took a sulphur match from his pack, struck it on his trousers, and set the grass alight. Then he walked up to the bear and threw the blazing stuff into its face. The bear gave a spit of terror, turned, and went scampering into the bush, leaving free passage for us on the trail.

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Getting back to camp on another occasion, I began to feel leg-weary, and I sat down to rest. It was a lovely autumnal evening, still to the point of eeriness. I had begun to fill my pipe when there came a crackling in the undergrowth facing me. I was sitting right opposite a bear's den, from the mouth of which the occupant was forcing his way out.

I sat perfectly still. Either Bruin did not see me or he was much too immersed in his own affairs to be bothered with noticing me, for he ambled out unconcernedly into the open and sat down on his haunches facing the setting sun. He was sleek and fat to a wonder, and I watched him with no little curiosity, for it looked as if he was performing some kind of a rite. He began to sway from side to side, with his gaze fixed on the fast-declining sun.

Gradually the arc of his swaying increased until it was quite covering a couple of feet. I wondered if he could be ill or was suffering in some way.

The swaying went on for several minutes, then stopped. He stood right up on his hind-legs and held both his fore-paws out towards the sun. Then he rolled to the mouth of the den and disappeared inside. I let him have a minute or two to settle and crept quietly over to listen. I could not hear or see any sign of life.

When I got back to camp I told the Indians what I had seen. They said I had witnessed a very rare sight, that of a bear 'denning up.' They said that when food is most plentiful, just before the onset of winter, the bear fills himself a-plenty with nuts and berries. He waits for just such a clear, summery evening as I have described, when he, as the Indians put it, "Sit looking at the sun until he get sleepy." Then he rolls into the den, and does not come out again until after the winter has passed.

The bear's process of preparing for hibernation seemed to me one of self-hypnotism. Many years later in India I had a chance of seeing a fakir submit himself to the ordeal of being buried alive. His preparation rite was not at all unlike the bear's, for he knelt facing the setting sun, and after incantations and rhythmic gestures fell into a trance. On this his

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assistants put him into a coffin, screwed down the lid, and buried him at least six feet under the ground. A guard was posted over the 'grave' night and day. Some weeks later the coffin was disinterred. The lid was unscrewed, the fakir was lifted out, and in a surprisingly short time he was on his feet, apparently very little the worse for the ordeal.

The friend through whose offices I was enabled to see the occurrence told me that for a day or so prior to being interred this fakir prepared himself by fasting and purging. Towards the approach of the moment for putting himself into the trance he closed all the orifices of his body with wax and filled his stomach with goat's milk. When, facing the setting sun, he felt the hypnosis descend upon him he rolled back his tongue to seal his throat. Then his assistants buried him.

When the fakir was taken out of the coffin again an assistant knelt on his chest and, putting a finger into his mouth, unrolled the tongue. At the same time some sort of respiratory movement of the arms was used. The fakir gave a long-drawn sigh as the air filled his lungs, opened his eyes, and was literally back from the grave.

VI

THE 'WILD AND WOOLLY'

WE had nearly finished the timber limit. The next move would be up to the 'monkeys'—the men whose job it was to make the roads. The days were getting shorter, and oftentimes we had to give up our work on the line soon after three in the afternoon.

With the coming on of winter camp life in the open entailed more hardships, demanded greater hardihood. I had been wondering how I should get along in the frozen North with no more than canvas protection, when stoves were brought up the trail into the camp. They were fitted into the tents, one apiece, and the occupants of each tent had to take turns, week by week, in seeing that the stove was always burning. Then I learned with no little satisfaction how really warm one could keep in those small tents, even when the thermometer outside was showing thirty below zero. It was necessary at the same time to exercise plenty of care, for the intense cold offered many dangers.

If an axe had been left out all night in the cold and one was careless enough to pick it up by the metal head the effect would be as if one had been scorched. And, dropping the axe, one would find the skin actually off the fingers. The temper of steel is affected by cold no less than by heat, but, where heat softens the metal, intense cold hardens it, renders it brittle. So that before one starts using an axe in the winter it is necessary to pass the head gently backward and forward over a fire until the proper temper is in the bit. Without this precaution the likelihood would be that with the first blow at a tree-trunk the head would splinter like glass.

Even laboratory experiments on the effects of freezing can give no conception of the strange things in nature that happen through the intense cold. Soft trees like poplar and balsam

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often freeze through, and then the bark, by the contraction of the wood it contains, will split with a crack like the report of a heavy pistol. Often at nights I have lain and listened to perfect fusillades, like the sounds of a small war, all around me. The sound made by a great lake as it freezes up is almost terrifying at first hearing. As the surface solidifies it is forced up in the centre until an ice hedge, from three to four feet, or even more, high, runs right across, and the crunching of the ice as this hedge goes up sounds full of ill-omen.

Carelessness in the open can readily lead to frost-bite, a very painful thing. And unwary travelling through the snow can easily bring on snow-blindness. Against this last, it seems, the Indians need take no precautions. I learned this, as I learned of simple dodges a white might employ, while out one day with one of the race. We came to a snow-field, off which the sunlight was reflected glaringly. I put my hands to my eyes and refused to cross it. I was going to make my way round its edge by the bush, which meant an extra three or four miles' trekking. My Indian knew better than that. He produced from his pocket a piece of moose-hide and tied it over the bridge of my nose, round by my ears, to the back of my head.

"Now," he said, "you feel and see all right!"

Sure enough, this simple device broke the glare admirably. This Indian told me that, failing moose-hide or a substitute, one could get the effect by drawing smudges with charcoal or anything sooty down the side of the nose and round the eyes. There was no need for an Indian to use smudges or moose-hide against snow-glare. His dark skin made such precaution unnecessary.

I believe myself that it is not simply the glare of the sun off snow that causes eye-strain. When the wind blows across the snow-fields they become rippled, like beach sand after the tide has ebbed, and on dull days one is always straining to see whether the snow is in waves or flat. It is one's interest to take stock of the kind of snow one has to traverse, the constant scrutiny of the but faintly shadowed white, that causes snow-blindness rather than the sun's glare.

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In the long evenings of the approaching winter I had quite a lot to occupy me in the plotting-out on a small-scale map of the creeks and rivers we had met on our survey. But after a good spell on this work I was free to join the other men in a game of poker. This was their most fancied form of relaxation.

I had played the game in England, and I thought I knew it, but I had not been playing long with those men of the outfit before all my preconceived notions of poker-playing went completely by the board. Since that time I have played the game in all parts of the world—in the smoking-rooms of liners and in the best kind of clubs—but I do consider that the best players I have ever sat in with were those men of the lumber- and mining-camps in the Canadian North-west. It was, I admit, an expensive school to graduate in, but it would be hard to convince me that the price of tuition was not worth it. I know that the lessons I had there have stood me in good stead in all parts of the globe.

Here are two Swedes playing 'dollar rises':

Said the dealer to the ante-man, "'Ow many cards you vant?"

"Von." The card was dealt him.

"I stand pat," said the dealer, "and I bets a dollar."

"And I raises you von."

The betting ran to fifteen dollars, ding-dong.

"I'll see you," said the stand-patter then. "Vot you got?"

"Qveens."

"How many?" asked the stand-patter, who apparently knew his man.

"Von."

"Good enough," said the stand-patter. "You take the pot."

There were lessons to be got from that sort of thing. Men would play to the strict value of their hands with absolutely the same expression as when they were putting up a bluff. But if one flattered oneself that one knew this fellow or that fellow's line or system one was simply asking to have the boots taken off one.

There was a special lingo used in North-west poker, and it

took some time to pick it up. Two pairs—for instance, aces and kings—were called “big dick.” Threes and twos were “nits and lice,” while threes and fours went higher on the biological or zoological scale to “rats and mice.” I have never been able to discover why aces up on eights should be called “the hand the Dead Man held” (elsewhere than in Canada it is “jacks up on eights”), but the North-west players, like their brethren all over America, have the superstition that it always wins. In my own experience I have seen the hand come up many and many a time, but I have never once seen it beaten. All over the North three threes were known as “Morgan’s orchard.” The explanation is that Morgan, a big gambler in the Yukon, had an impediment in his speech which made him call the hand “tree trees.”

We had in camp no actual money to play with, and we used haricot-beans as counters. In this regard, though we did not play for heavy stakes, we used a system which kept the games steady. It is one that other card-players might find useful. Actually, when we sat down to begin a game, we did not know what value the beans represented. They might mean five cents apiece, a dime, or a quarter. In consequence, while playing the game we thought of the beans as representing top value. At the finish of the game the value of the beans was decided by the throw of a dice from a box, and accounts were settled on the day of the big pay-off. There were occasions after a bad streak of luck when the sight of the cent value popping from the box meant a deep sigh of relief.

Though, as I say, I have played cards in some of the best places throughout the world I have never encountered players with finer ‘sporting’ instincts than those men of the lumber-camps. There was, for example, the way in which they would give a man who had been out of luck what they called a “show-down.” This is something that I have never seen outside the North-west, so often regarded as wild and woolly. When a man whose luck has been badly out announces that he is going to quit one player or another inevitably suggests a show-down for him. The recipient has cards dealt to him in the ordinary way. He puts up no stake, but is permitted to

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take cards in the draw just as if he had. He puts the filled hand face down on the table, and there it lies until the betting, in which he takes no part, is over. When the hands are called his is turned over. If it is the best hand exposed he gets the pot.

I remember having a run of consistent bad luck in a game that I was playing with the French-Canadian, Ben Duclos, and some others. I said at last that I was quitting.

"Give Jack a show-down," Ben suggested.

"Sure!" was the chorus.

The deal was made. I caught a pair of sevens, but failed to improve on the draw. I turned the hand over, none the less, and waited. It looked as though Ben had the stuff all right, for he put the betting up to the limit at his shout. It was the same when it came for him to speak again. The others got cold feet.

"It's your pot, Ben," said Fred Yardley, last to chuck in.

"No, Jack has me beaten," Ben declared, and chucked his cards in the discard.

"But, good life," I protested, "I've only got a pair of sevens."

"Beats me, anyway," said Ben.

There was nothing I could do but take the pot, since Ben's cards were in the 'deadwood.'

§ ii

Within a week or so we were due at the Athabasca Landing, where the outfit would break up. The Indians would go back to their own encampments, and the boys would go down to town with the boss for the big pay-off. Our camp was only about four miles from Big Ben's place—he was the owner of the store there—and on Saturday nights some of us in the outfit would walk over there for a yarn and a game of cards. Some settlers from near by would be there, and a lumber-jack or two.

Some of the outfit were drinking in the bar on Saturday night when Ben came in.

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"Say, boys," he greeted us, "seen anything of Budweiser?"

Budweiser was one of the near-by settlers. He had a job carrying mails for the Government to stations in the Far North. For this, in the summer, he used pack-horses, and in the winter he ran a team of dogs. With dogs he was a wonder, and there were few even among the Indians who could compete with him for either speed or endurance. I have myself seen him get in from a day's run of ninety miles from Sturgeon Lake, unharness and feed his dogs, then step across to the shack of Louise, the half-breed girl, and dance far into the next morning.

We said we had seen nothing of him.

"Poor devil!" said Ben. "I'm uneasy in my mind about him—haven't seen skin nor hair of him for days. You heard about his loss, I suppose?"

"Not a thing. What did he lose, Ben?"

"Everything," said Ben. "Remember that big blizzard two months ago?"

"I should think we did," I answered for the rest. "We were camped out in it."

"Well, then, you know how sudden it came on. Bud was caught napping by it with his cattle out feeding. He went out to look for them, got lost himself, and two days later found his beasts, frozen stiff all of them, in the bush."

"Not all the beasts he had, surely?"

"Every goddam one. Eleven horses. All he had," said Ben, not without a kind of ghoulish relish, though he had plenty of sympathy for Budweiser. "Poor mutt's had to give up his toting job for the Government, and of course he can't fetch up stuff for the settlers round here any more."

Somebody asked how Bud was taking this heavy stroke of ill-luck.

"Damn' bad," Ben said laconically. "Been on the booze ever since."

Abe, the bartender, thought that Budweiser was too hard a worker to quit, and Bendorf, my German-Jew friend, said it was a pity somebody didn't stake Bud a new outfit. At that Abe laughed.

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"Bud ain't so goddam popular as that!" said he.

The catch of the door-latch lifted at that moment and the man we were discussing came in. He shut the door quickly, drew off his mitts, and flicked the powdery snow from them and his moccasins.

"Evenin', Bud," said the bartender. "We was jus' talkin' about you."

The newcomer gave no direct answer, but strode across to the counter.

"Gimme a drink," he ordered—"and look lively!"

He poured himself out a stiff jolt of hooch and chucked it down his throat. It was scarcely gulped before he refilled his glass. Then he glared round the room. In the corner by the stove sat Harry Bendorf, quietly repairing his traps. Budweiser caught sight of him, and an evil glint came into his eyes. He strode across the room, caught the Jew by the shoulder, and yanked him to his feet.

"What'n hell were you hanging around my shack for this morning?" he roared. "Some idea you'd find Louise there, hey?"

"Vy, Bud," protested Bendorf, "I just shot a coupla spruce hens yestiddy, an' I thought Louise could make use of 'em."

It would just be like Bendorf to have a mind to the likely scarcity of food in Budweiser's shack after the loss of cattle and job. But the explanation only added fuel to Bud's wrath.

"When I keep a woman," he snarled, "I don't need anybody to help feed her, see? I kin do that on my own. You keep away from my shack!"

He flung Bendorf half-way across the room, and turned to the rest of us. "If that swine comes round after my woman," he muttered, "I'll let daylight into him!" He eyed me then. "How's chances for a game to-night?"

"Yes," I nodded. "I'll come in."

Five of us sat down to poker. Abe put a bottle of hooch on the table and left us to it. The session went on for several hours, Bud drinking steadily all the time and as steadily losing.

At last we played the jack-pot round, and got up to put on our furs preparatory to going across to the sleeping shack.

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Bud stopped us. "Jus' a minute, boys. Got to tell you my good news!"

We went back to the bar. Bud's face was flushed, and the gleam in his eyes came from something other than mere drunkenness.

"You heard how I lost all my horses in that blizzard two months ago?"

His gaze went searchingly from one to another of us, and we all got out something about "damn' hard luck." Bud reeled back against the bar counter and supported himself, swaying on an elbow.

"Well," he said jubilantly, "they've come back—they've come back, I tell you! I wen' in'o my barn yes-day—an' there they were! Little Turnip—you 'member 'm, hey?—he nosed in'o my pocket for the lump o' sugar he knows I've always got for him. Diamon', the bell-mare, she shook her old neck at me—wants the strap round it again—and she'll have it, too. It's like the old times all back again," he babbled in a breaking voice. He began to weep.

None of us said anything. He pulled himself together a bit.

"I must be off to feed an' bed 'em down," he said. He drained his glass and staggered out of the shack. "See you nex' Saturday!" he shouted, and slammed the door behind him.

"Now, that's damn' funny," said the bartender. "I wondered what Bud was doin' totin' hay and straw into his barn one mornin' this week. And I know that he's ordered up some oats. But there's nary a sign of hoss about the place!"

We men of the survey outfit were back again at Big Ben's place next Saturday night—a beautiful night, but intensely cold. The temperature must have been at about fifty below. When Bud walked in his gait was unsteady. He had been hitting the hooch hard. His voice in greeting the outfit lot was thick, but he ordered a bottle from Abe.

"What about a game, Bud?" Fred Varley asked, more, I think, to get Bud's mind off the liquor than anything else. The man wasn't up to playing poker.

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"I'll play," Bud said. "Come an' have a drink with me first, you fellers."

Fred's regard of Budweiser made me think of his professional achievements.

"Let's play first, Bud," he suggested quietly, and Bud agreed.

We sat down to a game, but it developed no pep at all. Bud was forgetful even for a souse, and the cards were running badly. There was no fun in the game, and we soon packed up to have a final drink. Bud half roused himself.

"Listen, you boys! I nearly forgot the very thing I came for," he said. "I'm throwing a stag-party at my shack to-morrow night, and I want you to come along. You, Fred—and Jack, and Ben and Jim." Then his gaze fell on Harry Bendorf. "You too!" he added. "And if you're missin' I'll damn' well come and fetch ya!"

"You don't want *me*, Bud!" the little man protested.

"Sure, I do—partic'rly—an' you take care to turn up!" said Bud. He turned to the bartender. "Gimme a coupla bottles and put my face in the till!" He grabbed the bottles and made for the door.

"Eight o'clock to-morrow, boys. Don't forget!"

The door slammed, and we were left looking at each other, not without perplexity. Bendorf spoke.

"Bud's 'ad a rough passage. Per'aps if ve go it'll help to take his mind off 'is bad luck. Been broodin', that's what."

Fred Varley approved of Bendorf's idea, and we agreed to meet the next evening at eight.

We all forgathered in Ben's at the appointed time. It was another lovely night, and we crunched through the snow together to Bud's shack, which stood in a clearing just off the trail no great distance out. Big Ben lifted the latch, and we walked in. A large wood stove burned bright and warm in Bud's one room. He was standing by it, and he came forward to greet us.

"Glad to see you, boys. Come right in."

As he closed the door behind us he slipped the catch. That struck me as odd. No one locks his door in those parts.

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Bud had put boxes and logs about the room as seats in some sort of order, and he began to arrange us almost formally. "You sit here, Fred—you there, Jack. . . ."

I began to shift my seat a bit closer to Fred's, a proceeding that seemed to annoy Bud.

"Leave the goddam seats where I've put 'em, will you?" he shouted. I subsided meekly where I was.

When he had us arranged to his liking he pulled a small table close to the window and set a chair behind it for himself.

He looked round us again in a searching sort of way, then turned to a small cupboard on the wall. We thought he was getting out glasses and a bottle for the party, and prospects looked more bright at once. But when he shut the cupboard door and faced us he had a gun in either hand. I shall never forget the look on his face, in his eyes. We were staring at a raving madman.

"Boys," he said, in a cool, deliberate way, "I reckon none of you brought a gun to this party, but I'm damn' well going to make sure."

He called each of us to him one by one, keeping the rest covered the while, and rubbed us down for guns. Of course, we hadn't any. He got us all back to our places.

"You know my horses came back last week," he said then. "Well, they've gone—they've gone!" His voice rose in a shriek. "And I know where. They've gone to the happy hunting-grounds, and we're goin' after them to-night!"

I thought he was play-acting. "Quit the fooling, Bud," I said, and got up to go.

"Sit down, you bloody fool!" he yelled. "Move another inch and I'll pump you full of lead!"

I caught that look in his eyes again. It didn't look so much like play-acting after all, and I dropped back into my seat. Fred Yardley's quiet voice fell soothingly across the tension:

"Funny sort of a party you're throwing, Bud, isn't it?"

A puzzled expression chased the mad look from Bud's face and eyes. He seemed to be trying to remember something. Then the mad look came back, and he grinned leeringly.

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"Why, yes, it's a party. Let's have a song. Sing one of your English ones, Jack," said he, pointing a gun at me.

I thought something might be gained by humouring him, and to mark time I turned to Harry Bendorf to ask him what song he would like.

Bud rapped out, "If you fellers want to talk to each other you got to do it through the chair. And I'm chairman, see?"

It was as plain as could be that he suspected an attempt to concert a plan of escape, and that he wasn't having any. He rapped on the table.

"Let 'er go, Jack!" he commanded.

I have no idea what my voice sounded like, but I'm certain there was no great steadiness or tune in it. Bud kept time in the chorus with one of his revolvers, and used them both at the finish to join in the applause by rapping them on the table. The boys clapped me heartily, almost fulsomely. It sounded like a kind of hysteria. Then Bud called on Jim Mitchell for *Young Monroe*. This started the tears running down my cheeks and down the cheeks of the others. The situation was playing cat and banjo with the nerves of all of us. From his table Bud had the drop on us all. He commanded both window and door.

Big Ben was sweating. His face looked as if he had just come in out of the rain and hadn't wiped it. There was something else queer about him too, and I couldn't at first make out what it was. Then I saw what was strange: his hair was slowly standing on end.

To any man passing the shack it would have appeared only that a merry party was in progress. It would hardly have dawned on him that the singers were expecting any minute to die, though a look through the window might have puzzled him greatly. Ben was showing the strain more than any of us. His hair was standing straight up on his head, and it seemed to me to be losing its colour. It appeared to be getting dull and ashy.

Something had to be done. If Bud really meant to start shooting he might as well get going. I made up my mind to act. I got to my feet without hurry, and said, as casually as I

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could make myself, "Singing's made me thirsty. I'm going to have a swig of water."

"The custom in that country is to place a bucket of water near the stove with a dipper in it. Whoever wants a drink just dips for one, takes it, and puts the dipper back in the bucket. As I sauntered across to the bucket I could almost feel Bud's gaze following me. I expected to hear a shot and feel something hit me like the kick of a mule. But I got to the bucket. I picked up a dipperful of water and lifted it to my lips.

"Damn it!" I said, turning to Bud. "The blasted stuff's quite warm! I'll get a fresh lot from the well." And I crossed the room, bucket in hand, towards the door.

As I passed Bud I looked him full in the face. There was a half-puzzled expression in his eyes, as if I had put him off his guard. I had heard that mad people could be sane on all but the point of their mania, and I had been natural enough, it seemed, to get by with my act.

I opened the door and stepped outside, drawing it after me. I had got away with it. I was free. But I thought of the boys inside, and wondered what would be the best thing to do. Run down to Ben's place and get a gun? That wouldn't do. I would be away too long, and Bud might readily grow suspicious and start shooting. I went over to the well and tried it. It was frozen up. I went back to the shack and stepped inside.

"Well's frozen up, Bud," I said. "Come outside and give me a hand."

"Me come outside!" he jeered. "Not bloody likely—not while there's a dirty Jew around to do the work!" He pointed his gun at Harry. "Get outside, you, and give Jack a hand!"

Bendorf needed no second telling. I expected him to run for his life once he got outside, but I misjudged him shamefully. As soon as the door was shut on us he grabbed me earnestly.

"Jack," he said, "der's only von chance for us. Do as I tell you. Fill some vater into the bucket and stick a big block of ice in it. Valk in holdin' the bucket in your right hand. As soon as you get opposite to Bud I'll chuck a log of vood drough the vindow choost behind him. The noise vill get 'im

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off 'is guard for a second. At that moment you must sling the bucket at 'im—hard. But for God's sake don't miss 'im! If you can knock 'im off 'is chair the boys can make a run for it."

The scheme sounded hopeless, but I was incapable of evolving another one. We got the bucket ready and went back to the shack. I lifted the latch, and as I walked in I left the door open behind me, first, to give the impression that Harry was on my heels, and, second, to give the boys a better chance of bolting for it if the dodge came off.

Three strides brought me opposite the table where Bud sat. As I came abreast there was a crash as the log came through the window. As Bendorf had thought, the madman turned. As he did so I hurled the bucket at him with all the force I could muster. I didn't dare aim at his head in case I missed. I let him have it on the chest. As the bucket landed the block of ice flew out and caught him a good crack under the chin. He was bowled clean off his chair, but not knocked out.

"Out, boys, out!" I shouted.

The yell was needless. The boys were already on their way to the door. They had half expected Harry and myself to concoct something, and they were waiting for it.

Unfortunately the shack stood, as I have said, in a clearing, which meant a run of about fifty yards before we got to cover. We had scarcely gone ten when a gun banged off behind us. Bud was on his feet again, and was at the shack door taking pot-shots at us as we ran. We had enough sense to zigzag in our flight, and we were soon in the dense bush, but we did not think of stopping until we got well into Ben's. None of us luckily had been hit. But Ben was a casualty. As soon as he got inside his own door he crumpled into unconsciousness.

Scientists, I hear, say that the yarn of hair turning white in a night is—well, only a yarn. I will admit that excitement is not good for observation, and that possibly I may have seen wrongly; but this I'll swear: when we laid Ben out there was nothing of the fine, dark lustre in his hair that had been there when we set out for the party. It was quite without sheen, and the colour of wood-ash.

§ iii

When we had got back our breath we reviewed the situation. Budweiser was now a menace to the public. His shack stood by a frequently used trail, and it was a hundred to one that any unsuspecting Indian or settler that happened along would be shot. The nearest police-station was well over a hundred miles away. There was only one way for it: Bud had to die. But who was to kill him? Every minute added to the peril of the situation. We had to act at once. Fred Yardley spoke.

"I suggest," he said, in his quiet way, "that the answer is decided by the drawing of lots."

We all agreed. Fred bade us range ourselves round the table in any order we liked, leaving a gap for him. He picked up a pack of cards.

"Here are the cards, boys," he said. "Anyone can shuffle, and we'll cut in turn. Then I'll deal to my left. The man that draws the ace of spades has to shoot Bud. Are we all agreed?"

We all murmured agreement, and Fred produced a prayer-book and made all take an oath that we'd abide by the fall of the cards. All except Ben, that was. He was still unconscious.

The deal began, and in the first round nothing happened. The taking of a man's life was at issue. To this day I can see the cards fall on the lamp-lit red and white table-cover. They were blue-backed cards. And I can see the varied ways in which we looked at our fortune as Fred dealt them to us face downward. One or another picked his card up boldly to turn it over at once; this one furtively picked his up to peer merely at the pips in the corner. On the second round Harry Bendorf picked up his card and looked at it quickly.

"I'm glad it's me," he said, with an odd smile, and he threw the ace of spades on the table.

A thing happened then that I ponder over to this day, and I'm as far from understanding it now as I was then. Bendorf made one request.

"Boys," he said, "if I'm lucky enough to shoot Bud without

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he kills me, will you promise to put another bullet in his body when he's dead?"

There was silence between us for quite a spell. Then Fred broke it.

"I see your point, Bendorf," he said, "and I promise."

There was no time to be lost. We left Ben on his bunk, still more or less comatose, and set off through the bush to Bud's shack. When we got there we saw Bud leaning against the door, obviously watching for us. He had increased his armoury with a Winchester repeating rifle set against the door-jamb. In the clear moonlight he offered himself as a fine target.

"Now's your chance," whispered Fred to Bendorf. "Pick him off from here."

But the little Jew put his fingers to his lips and stepped out into the clearing. He began walking towards the shack. The *crunch-crunch* of his moccasins in the snow reached the ears of the madman. He wheeled quickly, saw Bendorf, and snatched up the Winchester rifle.

"Shoot, man, shoot!" we urged from the shelter of the bush.

The Jew halted and folded his arms while Bud took deliberate aim at him from the doorway. The rifle cracked. We waited to see Bendorf crumple and fall. But his arms simply dropped from his chest and his gun flamed. The madman fell on one knee, his rifle still at his shoulder. Once again, in the moonlight, we saw the Jew fold his arms and stand deliberately waiting for a second shot from Budweiser. It never came. Bendorf walked over to the door. We saw him place a hand on Bud's shoulder, and Bud toppled over. The Jew took off his cap and beckoned us to come.

When we got to the shack we found Bud shot through the heart. Bendorf, quite unharmed, was standing over him with the tears streaming down his cheeks.

We went back to Ben's place, and there Fred drew up an affidavit of the whole affair. This was signed by all of us, and was dispatched later to the officer in charge of the nearest station of Mounted Police. The affair straightened out without trouble.

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"Tell me," I said to Bendorf some time later, "why did you stand in front of Bud's gun? He took pot-shots at you as you ran across the clearing, and he had always treated you shabbily. Why did you let him take a shot at you before you fired? It was suicidal!"

"Bud was a fine shot, vasn't he?"

"One of the best for miles around here."

"But still he missed us all ven ve vas runnin' away from the shack. Looks like as if the booze and his madness had made his sight bad, don't it?"

"That's so," said I. "And we may thank God for it."

"That's the reason vy I didn't shoot first. Couldn't fire at a man whose sight 'ud gone bad on 'im without lettin' 'im have first crack at me, could I?"

I looked at the little Jew with a growing thickness in my throat. He had that odd little smile on his lips which had shown when he drew the fatal card. Harry was a hog at table, yes; but what, after all, are table manners?

VII

TRAPPER AND HUNTER

WHILE the survey outfit was still at the final camp, waiting for the word to break up, Tommy called me into the cook-tent one night.

"Say, Jack," he asked me, "what you goin' to do for the rest of the winter?"

I said I had made no plans, but that I didn't feel like loafing round Edmonton out of work for four months.

Tommy did not like that prospect either, and he made me a proposition.

"What about comin' North with me," he said, "an' finishin' the winter at fur-trappin'? There's a shack I know of in the Peace river country where we can bunk. Plenty of game up there, too."

"That would suit me fine, Tommy."

Besides being such a great cook, Tommy had the reputation of being as great a trapper. And furs were fetching good prices. It was decided between us, then, that when the outfit broke up we would buy the surplus stores and a couple of ponies from the boss and set out. The boss thought our idea a good one. He let us have the bulk stores at 'rock-bottom' prices, and added a lot of small stuff gratis. Tommy chose two of the sturdiest ponies, and these the boss agreed to let us have on loan. We were to pay for them only if we failed to bring them back. We sent into town for a supply of traps. They were in our hands in less than a week. The boss also agreed to bank our money for us against our return, and to show that his blessing on our enterprise was not mere words made us a present of a good tent.

The trek through the heavy bush occupied three weeks, and Tommy's cooking was never so fine as when he catered for the pair of us. The end of the three weeks, on a remarkably fine

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morning, saw us turning off a fairly well-established trail. And there, on the verge of the forest, stood the shack that was to be our home for the next four or five months.

It was a one-room hut, with a stove in its middle and a couple of bunks built into the walls. We got a fire going in the stove straight away and unpacked the stores. The cayuses were hobbled and smacked off to rustle for themselves. While Tommy stowed the food away I went in search of wood and water. Finding the latter, though the cold was intense, was easier than it may be thought. There is always some water-hole that never freezes. At such places the beasts of the wild come to drink in an odd sort of truce. Rarely will one attack another at a drinking-place.

There was a lean-to at the back of the shack which served as a stable. Here we found a quantity of hay and half a sack of oats, provender which would be of help in reconditioning the ponies.

Three days were spent in getting things shipshape, laying in a store of firewood and getting our gear in order. On the fourth we sallied out to set our traps. Then I learned that Tommy's reputation as a trapper was a just one.

He seemed to know the ways and habits of all the fur animals of the wild. Of these the lynx is the most difficult to trap, for his cunning is such that even the Indians are worsted by him more often than not. But Tommy showed me how to capture this fierce and wary wild-cat of the North.

We found a water-hole. We crossed the frozen creek a little upstream of it and climbed the opposing slope in a wide detour until we reached the crest. Here Tommy told me to wait until he broke trail down to the hole. I saw that in doing this he took very short paces, that he halted some way short of the water's edge, and that he came back stepping very carefully in his own tracks.

"That," said Tommy, "should beat him, I think."

He explained. A lynx, it appeared, will always use a broken trail if the depressions in the snow are suitable for its own paces. Hence the reason for Tommy pacing so much shorter than in an ordinary walk. The lynx, cat-like, does not like

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breaking deep in the snow because of the intense cold. But, though it will use a suitable trail when it finds one, it is always on the look-out for where the trail is leading it. Finding this one of Tommy's leading to the water-hole, it would be very apt to make use of it, but with great caution towards its end. As a fact, it would take care to avoid the last few impressions, fearing a trap at the end—the place where trappers usually set one. Tommy's trap, however, was set about five paces from the end of his track, just the spot where Master Lynx would begin to detour. And, sure enough, next morning when we went out a trapped lynx was glaring at us above the bloodied trap.

Going round our traps one morning, we reached one where the surrounding snow was all marked about with the trackings of animals. Tommy stopped at the sight of it to give me a lesson in wood-lore.

"See that deadfall over there?" he said, pointing to a trap of that sort which he had arranged at the foot of a tree. "You can see it's down. But what d'you think's in it?"

"Nothing very big," I said.

"No," said Tommy. "Only half a rabbit."

He could explain at once what had taken place. A lynx had been attracted by the smell of deadfall bait—a piece of putrid beaver meat—but, in his artfulness suspecting a snare, he had hid and waited till another creature came along. This had chanced to be a rabbit. The lynx had come out and given chase, not with the immediate idea of capturing and eating the rabbit, but of chivvying it until, to save itself, the cotton-tail should dart into the deadfall. Down had come the log. Whereupon, to celebrate his own cunning in escaping, the lynx had eaten as much of the rabbit as projected from the snare.

§ ii

At nights, in the shack, Tommy and I would sit by the stove skinning our catches and rubbing saltpetre into the pelts to preserve them for the market. We were, as far as we knew, the only white men within a radius of about two hundred

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miles. Half a mile or so down the trail some Indians were encamped, but the last tepee in our direction was a witch-woman's. At night none of the Indians would pass her tent, so we had no nocturnal visitors. In the intense cold all that we might hear would be the howl of starving wolf-packs and the cracking of splitting trees—sounds that made the silence all the more eerie.

Most of the time these nights we would be lost in our own thoughts. We had got to the stage of not talking much, but not through being bad friends. For the solitude of the North affects men queerly sometimes. There are those who cannot bear to be alone. I know of one man who developed religious mania and tried to crucify himself. He had not realized what a lingering death he was giving himself; but before the twenty-four hours or more had passed which would have seen his end he was discovered. He had succeeded in driving the nails through both his feet and his left hand only, and was slowly bleeding to death in agony. The discovery saved his life, but his reason had gone.

It is little less difficult for men to live as a pair in that solitude. It is necessary that they must be very good friends, unlikely to get on each other's nerves. Because, otherwise, it doesn't take two men long to arrive at getting sick of the sight of each other. Without compromise, some give and take, that feeling can grow to hatred 'of each other's guts,' and murder may be the end. Tommy and myself had got past any mutual dislikes. We knew each other well enough to be silent together.

One night we were sitting wrapped in our own thoughts. Outside it must have been nearly fifty below, and we had filled the stove with tamarack, a wood that can be burned when green and that gives out great heat. We were thinking of turning in when we were startled by a knock at the door. The latch was lifted, and in came four white men and a full-breed Indian. The leader was a tall, well-built man, obviously English. They had seen, he said, the light of our shack, and as they were short of grub they had looked in to see if we could stake them some.

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Of course, Tommy and I made them welcome. They took off their mitts and snowshoes, and slung their packs into a corner. And while Tommy set about preparing the usual bannock, bacon, and beans they sat round the stove, glad of its warmth, and talked. They had been out after big game, and had gone north to watch the trek of the caribou. Their trophies had been sent by pack train to Edmonton for shipment to England, and they were now heading for Vancouver to meet their wives.

"How far north did you get?" asked Tommy.

"Oh, past the Circle," one of them replied.

"And you did see the caribou trek?"

There was awe in the voice of the stranger when he made answer. They had seen a sight, he said, such as they had never seen in their lives. It was likely that they would never see one comparable to it again. They had been camped one day on the edge of a great defile, when they heard a noise as of the booming of a hundred big drums miles away. All the afternoon the noise had grown, and then in the evening they had seen the cause—a vast herd of caribou moving north. It had taken the rest of that day, all the next, and part of the third for the herd to pass.

"You may be able to imagine the number," said the stranger, "but perhaps you can't. I hadn't thought there could be so many caribou in the world."

We fed them and they turned in. In the morning Tommy roused them to a light breakfast.

"I've had a talk with your guide," he told the party. "He seems a bit uncertain which way to take you."

"Well, yes," returned the leader. "He doesn't know much about the British Columbian side of the Rockies. Perhaps you could put him wise?"

"Sure," said Tommy, and he turned to the Indian. "Know the MacLeod river?"

The guide nodded.

"Look, then. You keep due south along the trail until you reach that. Where the trail hits the river there's a store, and you can fill up there. From that point on the MacLeod you

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can follow its course till it joins the Fraser, and then you're right for Vancouver."

Again the Indian nodded. He seemed to grasp the direction.

"On the way to the MacLeod," added Tommy, "you'll pass among some hot springs. They'll help to check up for direction. But look out as you pass them. The soil round them is a bit treacherous."

After breakfast they loaded up and said good-bye. Pyke, the tall leader, was the last to go. As he turned to shake hands with Tommy I saw that he had a hole in his moccasin. I picked up a piece of moose-hide and went out of the shack after him.

"Take this," I said, "and mend that moccasin to-night."

He didn't want to take it at first. He was travelling light, he said, and the shoes would see him through to Vancouver. I kept insisting. Finally, against all his protestation, I stuck the roll of hide into his knapsack.

"Damn it all!" he laughed. "Making a pack-horse out of me! Well, good-bye, and many thanks for your kindness!"

And he went hurrying down the trail after the others.

Next day snow fell. It kept falling steadily for forty-eight hours. The white blanket of heavy snow alters the face of things everywhere, and even the most familiar contours look strange. And with snow coming down from a dull sky it becomes very difficult to keep direction. Tommy was rather uneasy about the hunting-party's guide. He said he didn't trust him. But if the Indian followed directions and the party made the MacLeod before the snow got too deep they could make up their grub at the store and wait there for better weather.

A week or more went by. We had almost forgotten the hunting-party. The snow had stopped falling, and the thermometer had dropped to somewhere under fifty below. With a brilliant night of moonlight outside, Tommy and I sat by the stove mending traps and stretching pelts on frames. Tommy looked up at me and broke our usual silence.

"Like to make a bet, Jack?" he asked quietly.

"What about?" said I.

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"I bet you ten dollars that there's some one standing at the door."

My hearing was—it still is—pretty good, but I had heard nothing. I was just about to take his bet when I remembered Tommy's superior skill in the bush. I shook my head.

"No bet, Tommy," I said; "but I'll go and see."

With that I put down whatever I was working at and crossed to the door. I pulled it half open. My heart gave a great leap inside me. There was something at the door, but it hardly looked human. A being doubled almost in two was leaning on the top of a short staff. Icicles hung from head and arms, and at the bottom of the staff there was a blob of ice as big as a football. The man was barely alive. His cheeks were frozen black. As I pulled the door wide he toppled forward and fell in a huddle on the shack floor.

Tommy sprang from his chair. "Quick, Jack!" he said. "Drag him on to that blanket—but not too near the stove. He's frozen stiff. Bring in a bucket of snow!"

We worked over him together to thaw him out. After a while a moan came from him, and Tommy bent over him to catch what he said. He caught a glimpse of the poor wretch's face in profile.

"Christ!" he ejaculated. "It's Pyke!"

He put his mouth to the frozen ears.

"Where are the others?" he shouted.

Pyke tried to speak, but could get nothing out. He waved his hand.

"I believe he means that they're down the trail," said Tommy. "I'll follow his tracks back."

Tommy set off with the sled. No snow had fallen for twenty-four hours, so he had little trouble in picking up Pyke's tracks. Most erratic they were, but half a mile along them he came across another of the party sitting propped up against a big spruce, quite unconscious. Tommy thought he was gone, but got him on to the sled and ran him back to the shack. The poor wretch was laid out beside Pyke to endure the agonies of thawing-out.

Once more Tommy went off. A good way still farther down

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the trail he came upon two more men. They were crawling on hands and knees through the snow. They were so far gone that they did not recognize Tommy, and they wanted to fight him when he tried to get them on the sled. He had to use force to quieten them. At long last we had the four of them laid out in the warmth of the shack, in varying stages of coming round. The Indian had disappeared.

For days Tommy and I nursed them, taking turns in feeding them with spoonfuls of brandy and flour soup. Slowly the blood began to course through the frozen flesh; the ice blisters on the hands burst and began to heal. It was pitiful to see them laid out on the floor. As they recovered they became completely childish. If one of them was reading—the only book we had was a store catalogue—another would want the book, and would cry at being denied it. If one in rolling over knocked against another there would be a scene, an infantile quarrel. When they had been feeding for a week on slops Tommy said he would cook them some fish, and that they could sit at table. This promise and permission made them as excited as kids over a party. We arranged them at table, two on either side. The look on their faces made one feel like crying.

Tommy issued orders. "You are to remember that for three weeks you've had no solid food," he said. "Your stomachs need careful treatment. When I dish out your food don't you start wolfing it, d'ye hear? Chew it well before you swallow it. Jack's goin' to stand on one side of the table. I'll be on the other. And the first man that begins boltin' his grub gets a bat over the head, see?"

We had to watch them through the meal as if they had been imbeciles. For second course Tommy had put up a steamed pudding—spotted dog. This was too much for one of the party. He rammed his portion all into his mouth at once, and, before he could be stopped, snatched his neighbour's ration and bolted that too. In very little time he was writhing with pain, howling, and hugging his belly. Tommy ran to the store cupboard, poured out a stiff jolt of whisky, and told him to drink it off. The poor devil gulped it down

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and fell on the floor unconscious. We planked him back on a blanket and left him to sleep it off.

That night Pyke told us his story. Snow began to fall soon after they left the shack. It practically wiped out the trail, but they had faith in their Indian guide and followed him trustfully. All day it snowed, and they had no sight of the sun. They came, however, to the hot springs Tommy had spoken of, and they felt that they were on the right road.

At the end of the second day from the shack they came on a river which their guide said was the MacLeod. There was no sight of the store, but they thought they would arrive at it in due course by following the river. All that day they kept trudging by the frozen river, hoping hourly to strike the store, for by this time their grub was finished. Next morning the snow had stopped falling, and they could see the sun. With that Pyke realized that they were travelling almost due east. He had been aware for some time that the guide seemed rather uncomfortable, and he asked him the name of the river. Was it the MacLeod?

"Not know the name," the Indian replied. "MacLeod lost."

In the answer there may be noted an odd trait of the Indians. If they find themselves astray in the bush or forest they are never lost *themselves*. They know where they are, and if one put the question, "Are you lost?" the answer would be, "Me no lost—tepee lost."

The Indian's answer to Pyke told the latter that they were on the wrong trail. The situation was serious. They were quite out of food, which meant that they would not long be able to keep warmth in their bodies. Quick decision as to the next move was of first importance. Pyke decided to make for the known rather than wander round trusting to luck, and he ordered the party to turn back along their tracks. This the Indian refused to do. He insisted that the store was near by, and he went off to look for it on his own.

Return was not so easy, for the snow had obliterated their tracks. Relying too implicitly on the guide, they had neglected the elementary precaution of memorizing landmarks.

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The good bushman, in pursuing a trail, will turn every now and then to fix in his mind the shape of the land behind him, so that, in the event of having to return along the trail, recognition will be the easier. Pyke, however, urged his party back along the unknown river, and had the luck to identify the spot where they had first encountered it. The idea was to get back to our shack, and he headed his party for the hot springs. By this time all four were weak with hunger and fatigue, for they had made no camp during the night, but had kept trudging along. They had eaten nothing for three days, and they knew they could not hold out much longer.

Turning away from the river, Pyke came on the frame of an Indian tepee. He broke two of its poles to provide a staff for each of the party when negotiating the soft swamps of the hot springs. It was the dipping of the staff into the slushy ground that accounted for the ball of ice on Pyke's staff, for some of the slush stuck each time the pole dipped and froze on being pulled out. The traverse of the swamps about the hot springs brought the party to almost complete exhaustion. Only Pyke's spirit kept them going. But at last, when they fell in their tracks from weakness, he pushed on alone with all the speed he could contrive to get help. He believed that he had covered the last ten miles in a state of unconsciousness. Certainly he was unconscious as he stood bent outside the door, and he had not the wit or strength to knock.

The only thing that kept the party alive on this agonizing return trek was the moose-hide I had shoved into Pyke's knapsack. Each night he would cut a section of the hide into small pieces, which he boiled in his billy. A skim of fat formed on top as the billy cooled, and this they carefully scraped off and shared.

§ iii

Sixteen years later I was serving in H.M.S. *Otranto*, and we arrived at Esquimalt for a refit. At the Union Club, Victoria, one day some of the members asked me if I had ever been in Canada before. I said I had years before, and, as a matter that might interest the group, I began to tell the story of

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Pyke's party. I had no sooner begun, however, when a member asked me to hold the yarn for a minute while he sent for the club librarian. When this official arrived the member said, "I want you to listen to the story this officer is telling, but before he gets going again I want you to fetch volume Number Thirty-eight from the library."

The book was fetched, and I went ahead. The story went down very well, and at the end of it the member who had stopped me reached for the book. He turned over some pages and said, "Listen to this!" What he read was my story, but told by Pyke himself from his angle. He had been a member of the club for many years, had lived in Victoria, and had died only a month previous to my visit. I should have liked to meet him again. As the little gathering in the club broke up a member remarked that now he knew the reason why the erstwhile keen hunter, Pyke, had never gone back to the North in the last sixteen years of his life.

§ iv

The icy grip of winter relaxed, the rivers cleared of ice, and green points began to show on tree and shrub. The time had arrived for Tommy and myself to pack hides and traps—the spring-time fur being commercially valueless—and to hit the trail for Edmonton and civilization. Taking stock, we found that we had about three hundred and fifty dollars' worth of pelts, not such a poor recompense for just over four months' work. We made the homeward trek, and Tommy had run the commissariat so well that we hit Edmonton one evening with only a sack of beans and a tin of tomatoes left.

We put up at an hotel, and for the first time in two years I enjoyed the luxury of sleeping in the ordinary domestic bed. I had never been so fit in my life. Exercise and the hard work out of doors had toughened me, and I had become a thorough-going woodsman.

For a week we idled, then I ran into young Noel, the Indian whom I had taken home to the encampment on Shining Bank Lake. We were pleased to see each other. Noel had been

operated on for the double rupture, and was completely cured. He was on the point of setting out to rejoin his people. Hearing I had no definite plans for the immediate future, he suggested that I should go back into the wilds with him to hunt and fish. His folks, he said, would make me very welcome. The invitation offered me a chance I had wanted for long enough, and one that was unlikely to occur again. I had had an interest in the Indians from the first day in the North-west, and here was an opportunity for seeing their ways of living at close hand. I said "Yes" with small hesitation.

"We pull out next Monday," said Noel. "We take you right along."

On the appointed day we set out for Shining Bank Lake. I was treated with no special consideration, but had to 'muck in' with the others. They were travelling quickly and lightly, and camp at night was made simply by stretching a slip from the side of the wagon, under which we slept in a huddle.

When we arrived at the settlement I was taken at once to be introduced to the chief of the tribe, called Rain-in-the-face. He could speak no word of English, but knew the Chinook jargon. I had picked up something of this lingo, and we made conversation. When it failed Noel weighed in. He had been to a Canadian school, and he knew English to the point of reading and writing it a little.

The Chinook lingo was concocted by the early settlers for communication between themselves and the Indians. It consists of only seventy-two words. Expression and intonation give shades of meaning. *Skookum* is the one overworked adjective, and an Indian can do anything with it. When an Indian smiles and lands heavily on the 'skoo' you know he has a high opinion of the thing described. If he shrugs and gives both syllables an equal value you are aware of his complete indifference. And the 'kum' hit hard, with a hearty spit and a wrinkling of the nose, lets one know of his disgust.

My lessons in the ways of Indians began with my first meal in the settlement. Pots were steaming on the fires, and when they were brought round by the squaws one dipped in for what one wanted. When I looked into the pot I immediately

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wished I hadn't, for I saw two large black eyes looking up at me from the broth. I was, however, hungry enough to forget the eyes, and the brew smelled very good. What surprised me was the amount that Noel and his brothers heaped on their platters. I took only a reasonable ration. But twelve hours went by before the next meal came along, and it was borne in on me that Indians had no regular hours for grub. They ate when they were hungry and drank when they were dry. The sign to the squaws that another meal was due was restlessness among the bucks. Then the women got busy with their pots.

The main food of the Indians was the game and fish they killed. The squaws did all the heavy work about the settlement, while the bucks lolled around and watched them. It was startling to see a young buck stroll out with his hatchet to blaze the dry trees that his squaw had to bring in. Fetching and carrying were beneath the male dignity. At first when I saw a squaw staggering under a load that nearly bent her double I had to keep a tight hold on myself in order not to spring to her assistance. But I knew that I should lose face with my friends if I did.

The only work for the bucks, as for the old-time Highlander of Scotland, was to hunt and fish. In this the women had no part. On the first moose-hunt from the settlement I started out with the men. But as they went through the bush, always with that marvellous sense of direction, at an even speed which touched about six miles an hour, I was speedily left behind. The pace, for a novice, was killing. I had to wander back to camp and face the amused grins of some of the younger squaws. The bucks returned with a fine moose, and the tribe was jubilant.

To the Indians the moose is pretty much what the pig is to the English farmer. If of the porker the only part not used is the squeak, there is a like lack of waste with the moose. The hide provides the Indian with clothes, the meat is excellent eating, and the entrails feed the dogs. The papoose gets as much entertainment out of the moose-bladder as an English kid gets with a pig's. The sinews are drawn from the moose's

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back-legs, dried, and split into a fine strong thread called *babeesh*.

It struck me as odd, on the return of the bucks from the hunt in which they must have travelled many miles, mostly at that lope, that instead of demanding a meal they rolled into their tents and went to sleep. When later I could keep up with them in the hunt I found the explanation. As soon as a moose was killed they were on it with their hunting-knives. One swipe severed the jugular, and mouths went to the gush of warm blood to drink deep and hearty. Not a very pleasant sight for the English neophyte, perhaps, until he remembered the brisk sale at home of those black puddings which are made from pigs' blood.

The hunted moose runs in circles, keeping within a ten-mile radius of his 'yard,' or feeding-ground. The animal feeds largely on the tips of young willows that are found in the marshes and swamps. When the Indian comes on signs of a moose he does not follow in its tracks. He looks for the circle on which the animal is running, and cuts off at a chord of it until he picks up the track again. He keeps cutting chords to the circle until he gets ahead of his quarry.

Moose are stupid creatures. I saw one hunted to the bank of a river. It plunged in, swam some distance across, then came back to land on the side the hunters were on. We attacked him, and he repeated the silly manœuvre. If he had done about a quarter of his swimming in the right direction he could readily have got away, because the current which he could face so easily would have been too much for the Indians, who would have had to fell a tree to get across the river.

I was curious to know what function was performed by the 'bell,' or tuft of hair, that the bull moose has under his throat, but none of the Indians seemed to know. It may be merely an ornament, but perhaps it has to do with the glands. One in every hundred or so of bull moose has a cyst on the shoulder, and the first thing the bucks do after drinking the blood of a killed moose is to open the hide at those parts. In the cyst, if there is one, lies the skin of a small moose, which the Indians regard as a mascot. Worn round the neck, it

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brings good luck in hunting. I had a mascot of the kind myself at one time.

It puzzled me how a huge creature like the moose, so heavily antlered, could get through the bush. An encounter with one of them browsing along the bush edge revealed its technique. When he heard me the bull pushed his nose, which is covered with tough hide, into the low shrub, then shoved out his neck until the points of the antlers caught the branches. He flung up his head and opened up a perfect passage to spring through. As he went the branches flew back into place.

Deadwood—the trees burned in forest fires and so readily uprooted and cast down higgledy-piggledy by storms—makes for rough going through the woods. I was negotiating such a fall in a hurry one day when I came on a space between the logs too wide to jump. Below the trunk I was poised on lay what looked like another log, and I leaped down on this, *en route* for a clamber out of the pit on the other side. But as I leaped my heart missed a beat. My log was an old bull moose fast asleep. I thudded on his belly with both feet and bounced off. I don't know which of us won in the clamber out of the pit on either side, but we took time to gaze at each other across the vacated space, both, I'm sure, a picture to the other of reproachful surprise.

§ v

I was very friendly with all the Indians until I upset the chief's son. I upset him so thoroughly that for days I dared not go out into the bush alone. A very simple but silly trick made him lurk in ambush for my blood.

In my tepee with me one day this young fellow exhibited an interest in a shaving mirror I had. It was one of those two-sided affairs—plain side and magnifier. I took it off its hook and let him see his face in the plain side. Like all savages, he enjoyed seeing himself reflected, and he smirked great satisfaction. I made a pass and turned the magnifier to him, slowly moving the glass nearer him. The closer it got, of course, the bigger grew his face. But I had not reckoned for

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savage mentality. As he saw his nose grow to the size of a cricket-ball he squinted with horror. With a yell he grabbed at the apparently expanding feature and rushed from the tepee. I hastened after him to assure him I could put things right for him, but he wasn't having any more truck with me. He kept well away from me, yelling to his father the while to make me stop the white-man magic.

I had the greatest difficulty in persuading the old chief that I had done his son no harm. Days passed before I could get him to bring the boy to me. The young fellow was still thoroughly scared, and would not look at me. Nor would he look at the normal side of the glass to see that his face was all right. I had to undo the magic, I saw, in proper style, or there would be no peace for me in the camp. I told the chief that if only the boy would gaze into the mirror I would cure him completely, and I urged him to talk to the lad as both chief and papa. That did it. The boy plucked up courage. I had the magnifying side towards him, and the moment he looked at his big nose I began to draw the glass slowly away. That fascinated him. At the proper moment I whipped the glass about and let him see himself as a normal Redskin. He gave a cry of pleasure. The feud was over from that moment, and we gradually became fast friends again. But I put the glass away securely for the rest of my stay in the Indian encampment.

§ vi

It was a marvellous holiday for me, and a long one. Unlike my hosts, who fished and hunted only for food or clothing, I did either whenever I felt like it. If I was not earning money, neither was I spending any. My upkeep cost me nothing. I had, however, to blink at conditions that were far from being civilized.

The Indian in his natural state is always lousy. It is inevitable from the way in which he lives, but it is a thing that causes him none of the repugnance that it causes the average Briton. To see a squaw going over the head of her master as he basks in the sun is to be reminded of the monkey-house of

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the Zoo; but to the Indian it is as commonplace an activity as our morning tub is to us.

I grew lousy too, and I am sure my hosts would have thought me unsociable if I had forborne to sit with them in the sun and delouse my shirt. Fortunately, in respect of securing unbroken slumber, I had learned the dodge of sleeping in my horse blankets. The smell of horse sweat keeps vermin away.

My tepee was near the chief's, and it was fronted by a strip of greensward that ran down to the shores of the lake. My hosts could not begin to think why I should run down to the shore every morning and plunge into the water. They regarded it as a foolish and uncomfortable proceeding. But as often as not in the morning I found I had a bedmate, and would awake in time to see some mangy cur slinking from the tepee.

For the Northern Indian dogs largely take the place of horses. It is they that in winter are harnessed to the flat sleds, and they perform amazing feats of endurance. I have often been asked if the Indians are cruel to animals. They are kind enough to their cayuses, but not to their dogs. The team dogs have a large strain of the wolf in them, as often as not being the product of a timber-wolf sire from a half-wolf bitch. A team is from five to seven dogs. It draws a sled loaded to as much as seven hundred pounds, and will run for over forty miles a day.

A team which comes into camp from having been on the 'mush' all day is just about ready to drop with exhaustion. The driver has no difficulty then in getting the harness off the dogs, for they are too dead-beat to snap at him. He will spread a few spruce boughs under a snow-bank for the weary dogs to lie on. Then he will take some frozen fish from the load, snap them in half, and throw the pieces as food to the huskies. The dogs thaw the fish with their tongues before they eat them. Harnessing the dogs next morning when they are rested and refreshed is different from taking the harness off. The driver has to go carefully. With a small axe in his hand he creeps up to the sleeping dogs. He stuns each dog in

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turn by a bat between the ears; then he drags them one by one, while still unconscious, to the harness of the flat sled and straps them in. And there they lie in a row all harnessed up.

The driver stands by their side with a rawhide whip in his hand, watching the leader dog. The moment the leader's eyes show a blink to consciousness he gives a shout of "Mush, you —, mush!" and brings the thong across the prone beasts. They spring to their feet, and are off down the trail before they've come to their senses.

The leader is always the dog with the least of the wolf in him. From his breeding he is usually more tractable, and the driver to some extent can trust him. The leader can spot any member of the team that is shirking his work. The dog that is not pulling his weight will get an admonitory glance or two, but if these do not serve to make him lean properly into the breast-strap there is a certain drubbing for him from the leader the moment the harness comes off at the end of the run. The amount of dog that is usually in the leader gives him a remarkable dominance over the others, so much nearer to wolf.

More than once I have seen harness-trapping on apparent wolves running with a wild pack. Behind this lay the story of a team that had been lost or had struck a blizzard, a story easy to picture: an exhausted man, all hope gone, propping up the flat sled to write a last message before blowing out his brains; the team cut adrift, but not yet slunk into the forest. They are sitting in the snow some little way off, watching the dying man. As he grows less active they creep in closer. Closer, carefully closer, they creep, until the man pulls the trigger. Then they are on him, tearing him to pieces.

§ vii

In spite of so much that was repellent to white ideas in the life of the Indians it was so carefree and simple, it had about it so much that was enjoyable, that I sometimes had a thought of going native. In another part of the country I had run

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across a man completely Indian, but with something about him that made me think he was white. He was standing outside a tepee, obviously his home. I asked him if he was white, and he answered me in Cree. Finding I did not know the language, he rather reluctantly, I thought, got to speaking English.

"Yes," he admitted, "I'm white, and English at that. But I've spent many years with these people, and I mean to end my days with them. I get all the hunting and fishing I want. I'm married to a squaw, and those three kids you see over there tumbling about in the sun are mine. For years I worked in my father's office in the Borough—you probably know it." He mentioned a well-known wholesale tobacconist. "What with taxes, business worries, and ill-health, life wasn't worth living. I chucked up everything and settled here. I'm as fit as a fiddle, and I haven't a care in the world."

His example almost persuaded me. His contentment was absolute. When, however, Chief Rain-in-the-face told me he was going to teach me the tribal secrets, though it wasn't much of a shock, my approach to the matter was somewhat tentative. If the initiation was to be followed by marriage into the tribe I wasn't having any. The meeting, which was to take place on the banks of the creek known to the chief and myself, whetted my curiosity. I meant to be there. But as for becoming a full member of the tribe—well, I wanted to know what it involved before I consented.

I met the old man at the time and place appointed. He was alone. He shook my hand with grave formality, and led the way on a long walk through the dense bush until we came to a clearing in the forest. And there, seated in a circle, were the remaining members of the tribe. The men rose when we appeared, and the chief took his place in the circle, putting me on his right. We all sat down. For a long time nothing happened; not a word was spoken. The faces of the men might have been carved from mahogany. It appears to be bad taste for a true Indian to exhibit emotion. He rarely smiles except with his eyes, and in ordinary circumstances such feelings as love or hate are not expressed by his features. The

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men in the clearing sat like graven images. The chief got up, and the rest did the like. He led me into the middle of the circle, and, standing before me, gave me a salute like that of the Nazis. The men all followed suit. Then the chief made me copy him. He spread the fingers of my outstretched hand.

"White man—Indian," he said, putting his hand over his heart and making me copy him, "all the same here. There are good white men, bad white men; good Indians, bad Indians. I show you now how to know good Indian.

"If you meet Indian and not know if he is friend you stop. He stop. You put your hand on heart. He do same. If you have gun or axe you hold in your right hand down by your side. Your left hand you hold up spread wide—so. He do the same. Then you walk to each other, and when you get so close"—he indicated about four feet—"you say one word, '*Nichtow*.'" I knew the word already, but the chief made me repeat it. "That means 'brother.' You open hand wide to show that you are hiding nothing, that you won't use fingers for pulling trigger."

The chief made me go through the act of greeting several times, and then called several men from the circle to try me with it.

I was then told I was a brave of the tribe, and that as such I could attend the ceremony of the making of braves which was due to take place in a day or two. Noel came forward and presented me with a splendid feather headdress. My Indian name was Moon-a-tim, which means 'big white man.'

That initiation, I presently discovered, did not quite make me an Indian. Soon after it I began to miss the young lads who were usually about the camp to help the squaws in cutting wood and fetching water. I saw that they were going off into the forest with one or two older men, to return only at sunset. I had heard it was the custom to instruct youths at the coming of adolescence on the mysteries of sex. When, however, I made an attempt to join the lads and men it was made clear to me that I was not wanted.

I saw the old chief outside his tepee, and I asked him what all the pother was about. He said it had to do with the

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making of the braves. Up to a certain age the boys were under the directions of the women. Some of them were due to be made braves, the winning of the mark of which would entitle them to hunt and fish with the men. The final ceremony was to take place on the morning of the full moon—about a week later. When, remembering the promise at my initiation, I asked if I was to be permitted to see it the old chief looked doubtful. No white man had ever seen the ceremony. It was forbidden by the Government, but the tribe kept up the centuries-old ritual in secret. I had been made a member of the tribe, however, and had a right to be present. He would consult the braves on the matter.

Apparently the braves thought I could be trusted, for by and by the chief conveyed consent that I should see the ceremony. The actual morning approached; the squaws were active in the preparation of a great feast, and some of the boys were strutting round with an air of great importance.

The morning came. As the day warmed the settlement became more and more deserted, until only the very young and the very old and infirm were left. I had seen nothing at all of the chief, and I was wondering if after all I was to be left out, when he stepped out of his tepee. He was in full Indian panoply and all done up in war-paint. He glanced at the sun, beckoned me, and set out through the forest. It was a marvellous morning. The giant spruces thrust their green, metallic spears at a shimmering sky. We trod on a springy carpet of millions of pine-needles. The old man was silent, and walked with a dignity which was really impressive.

We arrived at a clearing, round which the bucks of the tribe were fully mustered in a circle. No boys or squaws were to be seen. At the appearance of the chief the men rose with that Nazi salute. In the heart of dense forest the clearing made an ideal setting for drama and ritual; it was a natural arena. Right at its centre a pole was planted, with thongs of raw moose-hide depending from the apex. For a long time the circle of men, seated again, smoked in silence. Then the chief made a sign. Out of the forest came twelve lads and stood before him. They were naked, and their bodies gleamed in

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the sunlight. They were all awed, and some were actually shivering.

The medicine-man stepped into the arena. He was armed with a tomahawk, and he began to creep round the lads, intoning a weird song. His voice rose. He was recounting the glories of the chase. His steps became faster and faster. His leaps rose to five or six feet in the air. He held the boys fascinated.

The chief stood up and ordered the lads to take their places round the pole. He addressed them on their duties to the tribe now that they had arrived at manhood. They were no longer to work with the women. They were to hunt, kill, and take a wife, so that the tribe might increase. Much of what he said was lost to me, but he concluded by praying the God of the North Wind to help them, the Spirit of the Great Waters to send them fish, and the Lord of the Forests to show them where the moose roamed, and the bear.

The boys were now almost sick with excitement. The medicine-man led them nearer to the pole, some of them going with apparent reluctance. Each stood with one of the leather thongs before him. The chief felt their muscles and looked into their mouths. Then he signed to the medicine-man, and the boys cringed as he approached. There was a knife in his hand, its thin blade glinting in the sun. He seized a boy and turned him about so that all saw his naked breast. He bunched the flesh of the right breast and thrust the knife through the fold. He took the thong, threaded it through the wound, and knotted the loose end. He did the same with the rest of the boys, until they all stood tied to the pole with the blood trickling down them.

The men of the tribe rose and began to walk round the boys, chanting, urging the boys to do something. One and another of the boys moved out from the pole until the thong tightened in the gash on their breasts, but more quickly moved inward again. They were being urged to tear themselves away, to rip the thong from their flesh.

The walk of the braves became a frenzied dance. But still the boys forbore to make the testing move.

TRAPPER AND HUNTER

Now the squaws appeared. They dashed into the circle, each mother picking out her son, and urged him for the honour of his father and the tribe to break away. The boys were in the dance, moving faster and faster. Then one boy with a yelp of pain broke from the circle, leaving the thong dangling loose against the pole. Blood streamed down his bronze torso.

The medicine-man took soil from a freshly turned sod, made a paste of blood and earth, and plastered the wound with it. The new brave joined the bucks to watch the others face the trial.

The dance went on until all but one boy stood free. He dropped to the ground in a faint, and was untied to be taken away by his mother.

The making of the braves was over, all but the feasting. The new braves were proud of their gashes, which soon healed, with a notable scar to advertise their manhood.

I had the chance on this same visit to the Indians to see also the 'give away,' or betrothal, dance. It takes place in the mating season, and has a sexual basis. The young women stood on one side of the circle and the bucks on the other. To a song, accompanied by drums and the piping of whistles made from the hind-legs of dogs, they began to shuffle round. Then a buck sprang into the centre and made signs of mating to one of the girls. This, however, was not the real lady of his choice. That lady, pretending dismay, came into the ring and tried to attract her man's attention from the other. The pantomime afforded great amusement to the older folk who were watching. Buck after buck and girl after girl went through the same motions, getting applause and laughter according to their ability as actors or the personal variations on the idea that they could evolve. The bucks then dashed off to fetch gifts of fine furs, splendid feathers, and trinkets to offer to their girls. Another pantomime of acceptance and refusal was gone through, the manner of taking and giving back clearly indicating what matches were being made. Such a dance will be carried on for hours on end, getting wilder and wilder as time goes on, with the dancers dropping from sheer

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exhaustion, only to spring up and begin again when rested. But it is a marvellous thing in colour and movement for anyone to see.

§ viii

Those were days when some of the tribes still had not taken the treaty. There can be few—if any—free tribes left in Canada. The Indians are now all placed in reservations, I suppose, with an agent to look after them, and with teaching in the arts of tillage and husbandry. The doubtful benefits of civilization are pressed upon them.

The incursion of settlers made life hard for the Indians. With the coming of the white man, avid for gold or seeking to exploit the fecund soils or the stands upon stands of noble timber, the game that was the Indian food was driven with the Indians themselves into the inhospitable territories of the North. It may be that life on reservation holds all that the Indian needs of comfort and security, all guarantees against famine and want. But the hearts of the older men, of perhaps many of the younger, must turn with longing to the days when they roamed free on the prairie and in the forests, with chiefs of reality among them, and with the rigours of the hunt to keep the blood coursing in their splendid brown bodies. To most of them it must be that the glory has indeed departed.

VIII

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THE tribe was going to shift settlement and go south, but I felt that I had allowed myself enough holiday to last a long time, and I was going to leave them. They gave me a farewell feast, which developed into another 'give-away' dance. I had already parted with all the trinkets and possible gifts that I had, but those kindly people loaded me with mitts and moccasins, and one young squaw presented me with a pony. My particular friends conducted me as far as the beginning of the wagon trail, and there we said farewell.

When I got to Edmonton I went to the bank, and there discovered that I had quite a nice sum to my credit. While still on the bank steps considering what my next move would be a stranger tapped me on the shoulder and asked if my name was Campbell. When I said that it was he informed me that the Mayor of Edmonton was anxious to see me. I had been listed as lost, it appeared, and letters for me had been returned, marked "Unable to Trace."

I called on the Mayor, introduced myself, and was severely lectured on my lack of consideration in not reporting my whereabouts. It was true that if the Mayor had thought of inquiring from the Survey Department at Ottawa he would have been apprised of what I was doing, but my carelessness was brought home to me when I read one of the communications from home that the Mayor gave me. It had been in his office for four weeks. It said that my father was far from well, and it hinted rather than said that if I wanted to see him alive I had better get home at once.

I went straight from the Mayor's to the agent for the C.P.R. and booked a passage for England *via* New York. I did not know that I'd ever return to North America, and I wanted to have a look at New York while I had opportunity. I had a

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friend in that city who had long been begging me to visit him, and I could put in two or three days with him while waiting for the ship to sail.

I closed my account and drew my money in American dollars, of which there were plenty about in Canada at that time. Then I bought myself a stout trunk. In this I packed my clothes, belongings, and all my money except twenty-five dollars. I addressed the trunk care of my friend and sent it off in advance. At the same time I wrote my friend telling him what I had done, and saying that I would wire from Montreal the time of my arrival in New York.

This move of detaching myself from the bulk of my money was one on which I congratulated myself thoroughly. It would prevent me from indulging in any extravagances on the journey, from yielding to those small temptations that could be so costly. But when, after cabling my friend from Montreal, I took stock of cash in hand I found I had cut things somewhat fine. I had only about a dollar. The discovery did not worry me much, however. With care I would get through.

There was something of regret in leaving Canada after three years. It had treated me kindly. But by the time the Albany express was drawing into the Central Depot of New York I was all lit up with the prospect of meeting my friend and of seeing the great city which had so filled my imagination from boyhood. The train had not pulled up when I jumped on the platform from the car. I gazed everywhere around for my friend, dodged in and out among the press of people. The press gradually thinned. I was left alone, walking up and down the platform. My friend was nowhere in sight. The time, I knew, was right, the day was right. I left the platform and hung about the station hall. An hour went by, two hours. Still no sign of the man who was to meet me.

I went over to the Inquiry Bureau and consulted the clerk. And right there, as the New Yorkers themselves used to say, I found myself up against the cold and unbelieving attitude of mind which, characteristic of such a lot of New Yorkers, makes their city the most lonely and forbidding that there is

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in the world for the lost stranger. The inquiry clerk's whole being registered the reception of a tall story. Had I known what an amount of that hard shell of disbelief I was to encounter in the next few days, that toughness of mind which is clapped into a nutshell by the "Oh, yeah?" of more recent times, I think I would have sunk to the floor of the hall in weak-kneed dismay. But I stuck to the clerk. I asked him to telephone my friend, giving him the name and address. He pulled out a directory and conned it through. There was, he said coldly, no such name at the address I had given him. I said I might have somehow got the address wrong, or my friend might have moved, and I begged him to try 'phoning such names in the telephone list as might have the same initials. He relented as far as to do this once or twice. None of the people 'phoned had ever heard of me, nor, it appeared, did they want to.

Night was falling. My money was disappearing in bites. I made up my mind to look for a cheap hotel and begin a more concentrated search for my friend in the morning. I went from hotel to hotel, but as I had no baggage nothing was doing without money in advance. I told the receptionists my story. They had all heard something of the same sort before, their attitudes said. Their hands said, "Gimme!" But I was not parting with the few cents I had left. At last I came on a receptionist ready to take a chance with me. After the bell-boy had shown me to my room I understood why. It was a first-floor room I was shown into. I pointed out that I wanted the cheapest room in the house.

"You should worry, mister," said the bell-hop, and as he spoke there was a crash, smash, clatter, outside the window as an elevated train rushed by. The prices in the hotel did not go by how near one slept to earth, but by how far one dwelt from the trains. And trade in the hotel was probably bad enough—it ought to have been bad enough—to make them chance taking even somebody in my condition.

All the following day I hung about Central Station. I thought that my friend must be ill. I imagined he might be dead. And my money-saving dodge of putting my cash in

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my trunk now appeared the act of a nitwit. I had never met my friend's wife. If it happened that he was dead she would send my trunk back to Edmonton, and I—with twenty-five cents between me and famine—would have to wait a fortnight to get it back—if I ever got it back. I had had nothing to eat since breakfast, and I did not see even that elevated-rattled hotel providing me with another night's lodging without payment. I took up a hole or two in my belt and hung on to my quarter.

Towards evening as I wandered disconsolate I came on one or two shabby men hanging round a fruit store. By some sort of instinct born of my need I guessed they were after a grub-stake of sorts, and I hung around with them. I was so hungry that the thought of a half-rotten apple or a squashed tomato made my mouth water. Just before locking up the proprietor swept out his store. There was some damaged fruit in the sweepings. I joined in the rush when the sweepings reached the footwalk, pushing and shoving with the best. I got a pulpy tomato and a squashed orange, and retired to a near-by seat to make the most of them. I was presently joined by one of the other men.

"On the bread line, brother?" he asked.

"What d'you mean?"

"Well," said he, "got money enough for a ten-cent meal?"

I replied that not only had I no money, I had no place to sleep. My answer showed me the irony of my position. My clothes were good, my linen clean, but I was on the verge of starvation. I retailed my story to the man on the seat beside me. He heard me out. Then he declared there was not a person in New York who would believe I could be such a sap. I was given a very distinct idea that he included himself in the generality.

"Well," I said grumpily, "don't hang around for me. I'm going to spend the night on this bench—if they'll let me."

"They won't," he grinned. "You come along of me, and I'll see you get a bed of sorts."

He seemed an honest enough fellow, and, anyhow, I had

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nothing to lose. We walked about for a couple of hours before coming to a halt outside what looked like a large barracks. We fell in at the tail of one of two queues of men lined up along the street. They were the sorriest collection of dirty men that I have ever seen.

"What's this place?" I asked my mentor.

"Army Shelter," he said.

"Clean?"

"Clean?" he repeated, with another grin. "Like hell it's clean!"

The queues began to move, filing into the place slowly. My turn for inspection came at last.

"Any money?"

"Yes," said I. "A quarter."

"Chip up, then," the official ordered. "Any keys or papers ya wanta keep?"

I handed over my last coin and my letter-case, and in return was given a little disc at the end of a long chain.

I followed the other men into a long room, where we were told to strip and put our studs and links, if any, into our boots. Naked, we were then herded into another room, tiled of floor and well heated, but looking like a cattle-market. Rails ran across the room, marking it off into small spaces. When these pens, so to call them, had each its disc-and-chain clad occupant the doors of the room were closed, and sprays of tepid water began to fall from the roof on to the rows of heads and smelly bodies. There was to each pen a little pocket containing a piece of soap for the use of those who really wanted to benefit by the compulsory bath.

After some minutes the taps were turned off, and an attendant came along to distribute towels made of something like blotting-paper. When the herd had blotted itself it was filed out to receive a brown-paper nightshirt apiece, and instruction to take the bunk corresponding to the number on the necklet disc.

Mine was a top bunk. Its mattress seemed to be stuffed with seaweed, with a strong but clean enough smell. I did not like the look at all of the man in the bunk next to me. Before I

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was well under the pitifully thin blanket provided he was snoring horribly, with his mouth wide open.

Soon after the lights went out my neighbour gave a cry and passed into a fit of epilepsy. The fits succeeded one another with but little intermission, and I thought I would never get to sleep. But I must have slept ultimately, for I was awakened by the clanging of the bell next morning. It went at daybreak.

The process of the night before was reversed, save that we had no bath imposed upon us. In the last stage we were given back our clothes in exchange for the discs. The clothes had been stuffed almost anyhow into net bags and hung in a fumigating chamber all night. Before this process my clothes, which were new, had been quite smart. They were handed to me in a mass of creases going all roads and fixed by the fumigating procedure. Breakfast was provided in the shape of a slice of new bread and a cup of hot, sweet coffee. Then we were turned into the street.

My guide came with me to the station. It was no use hanging about there all day, and I left word that I would return at six and meet then anybody who might ask for me in the meantime. The officials said they were making every effort to trace my trunk, but their attitude towards me was full of doubt. This though I produced the check ticket from the Edmonton booking-office. It was clear that I would have to get a job until I could come upon either friend or trunk. But that, I guessed unhappily, would not be so easy. Things were looking bad. There was a great deal of unemployment at the time, and the weather was as cold as it can be in a New York winter.

"A dern good thing it's snowing," said my companion. "We can get a dollar a day shovelling snow off the sidewalks. Mebbe a hot meal too if some old gel takes a fancy to ya."

He led the way to where a small hall stood in the shadow of a big church. Inside the hall a crowd of men were already waiting. We joined them. After some time a parson came out of a door in the lobby we waited in. He walked straight up to me and put a hand on my shoulder.

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"Well, my son," he asked, "are you willing to work?"

"Why, yes, anything," I replied.

At that moment I caught sight of my mentor. Behind the old clergyman's back he was making frantic and varied, but to me quite incomprehensible, signs and gesticulations.

"What is your religion, my son?"

Then it dawned on me that my mentor had been trying to put me on my guard. Admission to the clergyman that I belonged to a wrong sect would deprive me of a job. I thought quickly. The old man had called me "my son." That meant that he was, in his own mind, my father.

"Catholic, Father," said I.

"Good, my son. Go to the yard and get yourself a shovel."

"Thank you, Father!" I was out into the yard and had a shovel almost before he got to the next man.

The crowd was divided into squads to work in different districts under a sort of foreman. I had one sidewalk. My guide and mentor—I never knew his name, the scab!—had the one opposite. About noon, when I was feeling desperately hungry, a smart maid came out of a block of flats and told me there was a meal for me in the kitchen if I wanted one. It was a good meal too, which put heart into me for the rest of the day's work. When night came on we snow-shovellers went back to the hall and were paid a dollar. I've never had a sum of money in my pocket that made me feel so rich as that hundred cents.

"Let's have your dollar, pal," said my companion when we had gone some way from the hall.

"What for?" said I, naturally enough.

"Why, you mutt," he explained, "don't you savvy that we gotta sleep at the Shelter again to-night, and if you flashes that buck they're gonna skin ten cents of it for the night's lodgin' and five for a bath? You'll only git eighty-five cents back in the morning. Of course, if you wanna do the Rockefeller . . ."

"What's the move, then? We haven't got a banking account."

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"As good as. Got a safe place to cache our bucks in until the morning. Hand over, pal!"

I handed over. I was innocent enough to part with the wages of a laborious day. I waited at the end of what looked like a no-thoroughfare for the reappearance of Judas, but when I got tired of waiting and went down the *impasse* I found it was none. It had its exit, leading, if needed be, to the wide open spaces.

By dint of much searching I came to the Army Shelter again, and spent another miserable night. Next morning the snow had cleared. There would be no work even if I had known where to look for the church hall. I found my way to the station once again and interviewed the baggage people. They had been telegraphing, they said, to all stations along the line—a general call—to see if my trunk had been put off somewhere. So far there had been no word of it, but it was certain to be found. All I had to do was to possess my soul in patience. When, however, I suggested that the assurance that my trunk was safe might be strengthened by the loan of five dollars, to be repaid from the money in the trunk when it did turn up, I was told to 'beat it.'

The next few days and nights were so laden with misery for me that I shiver even now at the recollection of them: pounding the pavements in the daytime, dozing on the cold benches of the parks, haunting the railway-station; nights in those shelters, herded with the dregs of humanity, unable to sleep for the pangs of hunger and the thought of the hopeless condition of those around me, my linen growing dingier and my clothes more shapeless each day. It may be imagined with what yearning I thought of even the coldest night in the wild, with my blankets about me, but with the clean air of the forests to breathe and a billy of tea, bannock, bacon, and beans to wake up to in the morning. There was a whole week of it. The ship on which I had my passage paid for sailed without me. I could not leave without the trunk that held all I had saved in three years, without all the possessions I had in the world, leaving them to wander at large about the American continent. I had not the smallest lever to lift

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myself out of the pit. A dollar or two might have enabled me to wire of my predicament to a pal back in the Northwest, to Dan or to Tommy, asking them to wire me a grubstake. Their response, I'm sure, would have been immediate. And it did not occur to me that there was a British Consul in New York. I had acquired wood-sense in Canada, but very little knowledge of a worldly kind. And then that intentness of the New Yorker on his own affairs, that perpetual 'chip-on-the-shoulder' attitude, that belief that every stranger was toting a gilded brick—in fine, that "Oh, yeah?" cunning—it all got me down. I was lonely, lonely, lonely—and as miserable as hell.

§ ii

There was a touch on my arm.

"Say, kid," said a voice, "you look pretty well all in!"

I turned from avid contemplation of a window in a big food-store in Forty-second Street. It was evening. The shops were ablaze with lights, and electric sky-signs, then just coming into fashion, strung hot beads fantastically against a sky the blue of which seemed to have been put in with a dirty whitewash brush. I had been considering the consequences of a 'smash-and-grab' on the food-store window, for I hadn't eaten a decent meal for a week. I had forgotten what tobacco tasted like. I turned to find myself looking at a pretty enough girl, perhaps about twenty-five, but a girl of the streets.

"I'm no good to you," I said. "I haven't a red cent."

She winced at that, half turned away, but came back to grab my arm. Without a word she pulled me into a near-by *café* and gave an order for food. I tried to get up and leave, but she held my arm.

"Stay put, kid," she said. "I know what's wrong with you."

"But I actually haven't a red cent——"

"I know it. I'm staking you."

My hunger was too strong for my pride. I think now pride would have been a false pride anyhow in the circumstances.

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The food was brought, and I wolfed it down before the girl had begun on hers.

"Christ, kid!" said she. "You sure packed that away! Hey, you!"

And she gave an order for more grub. When I had put myself outside of that she produced a packet of cigarettes.

"I can't pay you back until——"

"Looka here," she interrupted, "get this straight, kid. I'm staking you to the feed, and I'm going to talk to you on the level. You know my game, but I'm not trying it on you, and I don't want your dough. I can see you're no bum, but you're out of luck somehow. I've got an apartment over on Fifty-fifth Street. What d'you say to coming back there and talking things over?"

It was the first speech with any semblance of kindness in it I had heard in New York, and, God knows, I needed somebody kind to talk to. I went with her. She had a one-room flat, with a kitchenette and bath. When we got in she made me rest in the only easy-chair there and told me to take the boots off my aching feet. She went into the kitchen, and I heard the clatter of a pan and smelled coffee. After that bad week, and after three years during which I had been in nothing more domestic than an hotel bedroom, the homeliness of the place—well, it made me want to gulp. I sat back in the chair and closed my eyes.

When she brought in the coffee and we sat sipping it an odd sort of restraint fell between us. Our conversation got stickier and stickier. I think I was afraid of saying anything out of the commonplace, anything to express the warmth I felt, in case it looked as if I was making advances. And maybe the girl was afraid in a similar way that I might imagine she had picked me up for no other purpose. At last I got to my feet and said I ought to be going. She got between me and the door.

"You're not going out of this place to-night, kid," she said. "You can sleep in that chair. If you'll step into the kitchen for a minute I'll fix it for you and get into bed. Then I'll call you."

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The whole business had got me clean out of my depth. I was too late to get into the Army Shelter that night, and I felt that if I had to tramp the streets in the bitter cold the dawn would find me in the Hudson river. I did as I was told. From behind the closed door of the kitchen I could hear her move about as she undressed and fixed the chair. She called me. She was sitting up in bed, having fixed the chair with a couple of blankets and a chair facing it to make up a sort of couch. I mumbled some sort of thanks and good-night, switched out the light, and rolled myself up in the blankets. Dead-beat, I fell off into the first real sleep I'd had since leaving Canada.

I awoke with the smell in my nose of bacon being cooked. The girl was in the kitchen. Her bed was made, and, but for my temporary couch, the room had been tidied neatly. I washed and dressed and came back to find her waiting for me with a good breakfast. When I had got that polished off she handed me a second cup of coffee and cigarettes.

"Now then, kid," she said, "spill it! "

On this invitation I told her what had happened to me. There was no "Oh, yeah?" about her. I finished by saying that when my trunk appeared I would certainly pay her back for everything.

"I'll see you through, kid," said she. "Doesn't matter about the dough."

As I left she forced a two-dollar bill into my hand, and made me promise that if I had no luck that day I'd return to her place that night. Well, I had no luck that day either in the matter of my lost trunk or in finding a job. As I've already indicated, there were many more men looking for work at that time than there were jobs. At eight o'clock I was back at the flat in Fifty-fifth Street. The girl suggested going to a dance-hall for an hour or two. I'd had my suit brought back to shape at a valeting shop while I sat waiting in my overcoat and underclothes. I could hardly refuse to go with her, since she had provided the money. And I did enjoy the outing, for she was an out-of-the-way fine dancer. When I told her as much she said she had been a professional

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partner at a large hall. One night a half-drunken man who had forced her to dance with him was rude to her. She left him cold on the floor and complained to the management. But the drunk was a friend of the dance-hall boss, and she was fired at once. That was what had made her, she said, "go on the batter."

When we got back to her place I must have looked uneasy again, for she repeated that I was to stop with her until I either got my trunk back or found a job. This brought up discussion of my predicament once more. I was saying that I could not understand why my friend had failed me, when the girl sort of stiffened.

"Where does your friend live?" she asked.

I told her the address.

"You talk of him writing you," she said. "Got his letter on you?"

"Yes."

"Let me see it, will you?"

I fetched it out of my case and gave it to her. She unfolded it, glanced at the heading, and jumped to her feet excitedly.

"I thought so!" she exclaimed. "Why, you damn' silly mutt of a kid, your pal doesn't live in New York at all! It says here N.J.—not N.Y. Your friend lives in *New Jersey*!"

Next morning I tore down to the Inquiry Bureau and did what I might have done at the start—why I hadn't thought of it, or why none of the people I had been pestering had not thought of it, I simply cannot conceive—I exhibited my friend's letter. I asked the clerk at the Inquiry Bureau to get through to the Newark exchange and discover if my friend's name was among the subscribers. If so, would he frank me a call?

"Sure," said the clerk, barely concealing his notions regarding my muttishness. He got through. I waited, trembling. There was a subscriber so named. Could he be put through at once? Sure, he could.

In less than five minutes I was through, and in less than an hour I was shaking hands with my friend. We had a drink, and I told my story. At about fifty yards from the

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Inquiry Bureau was the Lost Property Office. My friend led me to it, so to speak, by the ear, and there was the missing trunk!

I blame, of course, my own greenness primarily. But there must have been too a shocking lack of co-ordination between departments in those days, as there certainly was a distinct lack of helpful suggestion to anxious strangers. The officials had been 'phoning and cabling from the Lost Property Office half across Canada to find me, while within a yard or two I was pestering their associates in the goods office.

I told my friend about the girl, and we drove round to her place at once. She was just going out, and at first did not want to join us. But with money in my pocket at last, and so full of gratitude to her, I was not having any objections. My pal backed my 'play,' and off we went, the three of us, for lunch at a decent restaurant, with a show to follow.

My friend from Newark insisted on my going out to his place to stay until the next available ship was due to sail, but I promised the girl I would look her up before I left for England. I knew it would hurt her if I offered her money, and during the afternoon I found opportunity to buy her a bit of jewellery that would be easily convertible if she ever became hard up. I did not know her name. I don't know it now. I simply slipped the trinket into her letter-box when we saw her home. I know she got it, and I guess she knew where it came from, but it was not mentioned between us when I saw her later. It was nowhere good enough for her—one of the best friends to me, I reckon, that I've had the luck to meet. But meeting me meant, I think, a change of fortune for her, because my friend in Newark offered her a good post in his factory, which she accepted, and she had all the qualities for making the most of the chance.

I did see her again before I sailed for England. I called for her on the eve of my departure and took her out for a farewell dinner. It was after I left her that night that I had an adventure in New York which might well have resulted in my remaining there permanently.

I had heard a lot about the night life of the city, especially

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in the Bowery. I thought I'd have a look at that, and I wandered down to the East Side. It was not, on the surface at any rate, as interesting as I'd heard it cracked up to be. If anything, it was dull beyond measure. I started to walk back to my hotel. As I passed along a mean street something curious about a doorway attracted my attention. It was sunk some feet back from the pavement, an oblong of pitch-black, except for a vertical streak of light about a foot in length from the lintel down. There was something so odd about it that I stopped to have a look. What was the idea, I asked myself, in splitting a door in that fashion? And from looking I got to feeling. I put up my hand to feel if there was a division in the door all the way down. As I touched it the door gave way, and I half stumbled into an ill-lit passage, at the end of which was a better-lighted room. This was set about with small tables, at which men were sitting drinking in their shirt-sleeves.

I turned to go out again, and then I saw the reason for the division between the door and the wall being lit only for a foot from the lintel. A huge negro was standing with his back to the door, now closed again. His head reached to within a foot of the lintel.

"Stand away, Sam," I said. "I want to get out."

He neither moved nor spoke.

"What the hell place is this, anyhow?" I demanded.

He lifted a thick finger and jabbed it in the direction of the room down the passage.

"I see that," I said. "But I'm asking *you* what the joint is supposed to be."

He opened a huge cavern of a mouth and pointed inside it. Squeamishness hit me like a blow. He had no tongue.

I tried to get past him, but he was like a rock. He kept pointing down the passage. There was nothing for it, I saw, but to go along to the room inside. Putting as brave a face on as I could manage, I went in and sat down at a vacant table. At once a man came over and sat down by me. He looked about the toughest of as tough a collection of men as I have ever seen.

RETURN TO CIVILIZATION

"Drinks are on you, boy," he said.

I had, perhaps fortunately, deposited the bulk of my money with the hotel cashier. I had a little on me, but I did not see why the drinks should be on me, anyhow.

"Why?" I asked.

There was no answer to that. My opposite number sat looking at me coldly, and a few of the others began to come round, grinning. Some sort of sport was afoot, and I felt that I was somehow to be the victim or quarry. There was a pack of greasy cards on the table. I picked them up.

"I don't know what the idea is, but I've got only about three dollars," I said. "I'll play you poker—cold showdown—and the first to win ten dollars buys drinks for the bunch."

"It's a bet," said my opposite.

The game started, the men around watching with cynical amusement until it became clear that things were running my way. Then they started chipping their pal. He was getting sore; he had made a foolish bet, and I was sitting pretty with a good win.

"That should do," I said. "Drinks are on me."

From then on the drinks came fast and furious. It was not the best of liquor by any means, but I had to keep up. They discovered I was English, and would have me sing them songs of my country. One way or another I managed to keep them pleased with me, and about four or five in the morning they escorted me to the door and told the negro to let me out. I shook hands with as many as I could see and staggered into the open. The door slammed behind me.

It looked as if the dawn was breaking. I wanted to get to my hotel—wasn't my ship sailing that day?—but I could remember nothing about it except its name. At the end of the Bowery a cop was standing, rapping his night-stick against his leg. I went up to him and asked my way. He glowered at me.

"Where've you been?" he demanded.

I told him where I thought I had been.

"Y'are a liar," said he. "Lock-up for you, bo'!"

I was haled along to the police-station. A sergeant

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questioned me. I told him of the amusing evening I had passed, enjoying the hospitality Americans extend to the English. He probed shrewdly.

"Well, me son," he said at last, "it's the lucky boy you are to be alive this fine mornin'."

"Why?"

"Well may ye ask why. You've spint the night in the worst den o' crooks there is in the whole city," said the sergeant, and he reached for a book. He opened it and tapped a photograph. "Did ye see this guy?"

"I reckon I did. That's the chap I won the money off."

"That guy," said the sergeant, tapping the photograph impressively with his stubby forefinger, "is wanted for three killin's. We'll be puttin' the darbies on him before he has breakfast."

He set aside the book and picked up a printed bill. It was a description of my poker opponent—his height, the colour of his hair, and the usual formalized details of his appearance and habits. A reward of five hundred dollars was offered for his capture, or information leading to it.

§ iii

I sailed for England that day. I arrived home to find my father very ill indeed. In three months he was dead.

I felt then that there could be no staying away from home for prolonged periods, but I could not bring myself to settling down to office life. I thought again of the sea. The Navy was now out of the question, but there was the Merchant Service. I made inquiries at the Board of Trade, and was advised, as a preliminary, to undergo a medical examination. It was strict, and I failed to pass the eyesight test. I was barred for entering the executive side, and my only chance of getting to sea was in finding an appointment as a purser.

The Orient Line, when I got in touch with it, thought I might do. I was given a job as assistant purser.

IX

I GO TO SEA

MY first berth was in the *Orient*, the earliest of steamships to carry mails to Australia. She was making her last voyage, and she was fêted at all the ports of call. The voyage might have been her last in quite another sense, for after a rough passage in the monsoon from Cape Guardafui across the Indian Ocean this old single-screw, with a stack and four sticks, took a terrific hiding from a typhoon somewhere about the Cocos Islands. One single wave carried away the greater part of the bridge and lifted one of the boats clean off the chocks, carrying it intact over the side. The cargo shifted irremediably, giving the old ship a permanent list of about thirty-five degrees to port. To allow passengers to eat their meals the ship's carpenter had to level off the tables in the dining-room. One side of them was hoicked up to about four feet, and the other brought down to about two from the deck, so that it was a choice of practically standing to your meals or squatting on the floor. The boat that was carried away was picked up, with other *débris*, by a ship that passed us going in the opposite direction. She reported the find, and it was taken for granted that we were lost. This was before the days of wireless.

The reception prepared for us at Fremantle became doubly enthusiastic after we waddled into that port, three days overdue, like a one-footed duck, or like a drunken old woman with her bonnet askew. Reporters swarmed on board; luncheons and dinners were given aboard and ashore. It might have been politic, perhaps, to have left the list on the old hooker just for exhibition in the other Australian ports, though certainly our reception in these was nothing diminished by the repairs made at Fremantle. But it would have heightened the drama to have limped all the way.

WITH THE CORNERS OFF

My next ship was the *Ophir*, a show ship. King George V and Queen Mary, as the Duke and Duchess of York, had made a royal tour in her, and she was still in the state of magnificence to which she had been raised. The beautiful paneling was kept intact, and the gilding in the dining-room. I sat at table once between a bishop and a German baron. The baron's English was not so good, and the Right Reverend had no German. His lordship, indicating the ten female figures which held up electric lamps in the upper part of the saloon, said they might represent the wise and the foolish virgins. The professional joke had point in so far as that five only of the lamps were lit, but it went clean over the baron's head. He apparently had never heard the parable. The bishop related it, and the colloquy between him and the baron, who kept trying to make sense of it, attracted quite an audience.

The baron sat thoughtfully for a while after the bishop had got through, but it was plain he still had missed the point. Then suddenly, as he scanned the gilt figures, his face lightened up, and he pointed to one whose candelabra was lit, but whose pose and shape suggested, perhaps, something more than mere corpulence.

"*Ja!*" he guffawed. "I see it. *Zat* is von of the foolish vones!"

The galley on this ship did not extend right to the sides. There was an alley on either side. We were fighting our way across the Indian Ocean in the monsoon, and we were rolling badly. I was passing the galley and looked in. Luncheon was about due to be served, and Jacko, a pet of one of the cooks, was hanging to the deckhead girders on the look-out for scraps. Suddenly a bigger and quicker veer than usual put him off his balance and threw him clean into a big tureen of soup. Luckily for him, the soup was not very hot, and he was scrambling out without harm when the chef caught him by the scruff to sling him out of the galley. But he paused. The contents of the tureen was noticeably diminished by the quantity of *potage* attaching to Jacko's fur. The chef peered furtively round—he didn't see me—shrugged, and wrung

Jacko out, so to speak, into the tureen. I gave the *parmentier* a miss that day.

I was for three years in the *Ophir*. She was expensive to run in more ways than in coal consumption, which was high, but her expensiveness was counterbalanced by her great popularity among all classes of passengers. The royal *cachet* attached to her. She carried a yard on her foremast and looked like a great yacht, so very graceful were her lines.

There have been many fine books written round the duties and life of a purser, and I have no intention of attempting to add to their number. I may say, in brief, that the purser's duty is to see to the comfort of all on board, particularly the passengers. He is something like the manager of a big hotel. He has to see that the service is good and that accounts are kept in proper order. He must have an eye to wastage and all that sort of thing—just like an *hôtelier*. A ship of the *Ophir's* size would carry about eleven hundred people, passengers and crew. Quite a lot of people to look after in a bodily way.

As for life at sea, what I may have to say about it can only be incidental. After many years of it I have come to the conclusion that its effect on the character of those who follow it professionally is quite other than most people seem to imagine. The popular notion is, I fancy, that the traversing of wide stretches of open sea, the encounter with odd corners all over the world, broaden the sailor's mind. But, while admitting that travel has an educative value, I firmly maintain that shipboard life has a narrowing effect on the professional sailor. In general he is bigoted, self-opinionated, and ignorant. Living day in and day out in the pockets, so to speak, of his shipmates, he develops those characteristics in self-protection. With discipline to maintain among those under him and the need to appear promotion-worthy to those over him, being, as it were, under the microscope all the time, he must assert some sort of individuality. It needs an uncommonly genuine mind in a sailor to appear what he actually is, to admit his weaknesses of character, be unafraid of them, but to rise above them without fake. I am far from

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saying that the average sailor fakes consciously, and still farther from predicating a want of mettle in him. Fake or genuine, the British seaman has too often shown his quality of courage and steadiness in emergency, he has built up too splendid a tradition of initiative dependability, to deserve any sort of scornful finger. I only say that any deep weakness of character in the individual sailor is rather covered over than eradicated by the nature of his daily life.

Until the use of wireless became compulsory for ships of size, or perhaps more until the dissemination of world news by broadcast was developed, it was nigh impossible for the sailor to keep abreast of world events. And, having neither the time nor the inclination for books, he knew little of the trend of modern thought. It may be different now, but I question it. The sailor, even in these days, is given little opportunity for thinking apart from matters related to his profession.

In my view shipboard life has a way of intensifying the predominant traits of the individual. A man inclined to be mean ashore will develop into a real miser at sea. The fellow with religious tendencies will become a bigot. The good fellow on land makes a splendid shipmate. Sea life, it seems, develops the lights and shadows of character, leaving little noticeable of intermediate shades.

It is not, however, merely in the men who 'follow the sea' that crankiness or goodness is developed if it is innate. From a long and varied experience of passengers I have come to believe that an ocean passage has much the same effect on them. It may be, of course, that the cloistered life of a ship, the more constant contact with the individual, tend to keep eccentricity more under one's notice, just as it may emphasize personal traits of serenity of mind and natural goodness. But I feel it is not that altogether. I have seen such daftness in passengers under my charge at sea, daftness that has not been at all evident in later contacts with them in their own homes, that I am constrained to say that a large number must leave their brains in exchange for their passage tickets.

Let me, therefore, in my rambling way, talk only casually

I GO TO SEA

of life at sea, and as I remember them yarn to you of the odd tricks of shipmates and passengers. I went from ship to ship in the Orient Line, each carrying as many souls as might live in a biggish village or small town in England, so that I have a lot to dig from.

§ ii

Among the multifarious duties of a purser an important one is looking to the victualling of his ship. It is one, however, that can be made lighter for him by a good chief steward. Then through the agents that the big lines have in every port stores can be had in advance. A lot of the donkey-work of the purser's office passes, of course, to his assistant. The Orient liners carried his Majesty's mails, and though the second officer was responsible for their safe transit it was customary in my day for the assistant purser to give that officer a hand with them ashore.

The *Ophir* was the first ship to take mails aboard at Taranto. Until then they had been picked up at Naples, but taking them aboard at Taranto meant the gaining of a few more hours in London. The first Sunday afternoon that we entered Taranto remains clear in my memory. First, because of what looked like a huge blister on the surface of the sea-water in the harbour, made by a freshwater spring bubbling up with such force from the sea-bottom as to give the impression of a fountain; second, because of the reception given to the ship by the municipality on the institution of the mail service.

The Mayor and Corporation came on board in the afternoon, and in the evening there was a civic reception in the Town Hall. The officers and the ship's company were entertained with a performance at the Opera House. The piece performed was *The Geisha*.

On one return voyage from Australia when we got into the Straits of Messina we saw several small boats hanging about on the water. Each of them had a short mast rigged half-way up with a cross-bar, on which stood men waving red flags.

As we came abreast of them they shouted a warning to stop. There had been an earthquake. Messina, on the one side of the straits, and Reggio, on the other, were in ruins. It was not yet known whether the upheaval had affected the channel, but it would be advisable to proceed with caution. We put a couple of hands on the leads and sounded our way along the channel, anchoring off Messina.

Not a building in Messina was standing, and a pall of smoke from many fires still lay over the town. People put off from the shore and begged us to ship homeless refugees to Naples. The plight of these poor creatures was pitiable, and particularly heart-rending was the sight of so many orphaned children. Apart from the difficult task of victualling some six hundred extra—and hungry—mouths, the purser's staff had to help the stewardess and doctor in attaching the babies and smaller children, of which there were so many, to likely looking women among the refugees as foster-mothers. Many ambulances were on the quays at Naples to convey the wounded to hospital, and the ship was met by the King of Italy himself. The King praised the rescue work done by the ship's company, and conferred on the captain and chief officer the Order of the Crown of Italy. Some of us who felt we had done most of the donkey-work thought we should have been decorated also, and our amusement at seeing the buttons of the two *cavalieri* (we believed the decoration made 'counts' of them) fetching salutes from the rifles of the *bersaglieri* was perhaps not untinged by envy.

Such high-lights as these and remarkably bad weather apart, the voyages on a mail run are monotonously alike. Nothing changes but the passengers. The complement of the *Ophir* welcomed the news that we were to go cruising to Norway. This, of course, was in the early days of cruising.

Grimsby was our port and Thursday our day for sailing on a fortnight's cruise round the fjords. We carried about four hundred passengers on each voyage. It was a great change from the three months' run to Australia and back.

One day, the ship being anchored in one of the bigger fjords, the surgeon invited me to join him in a walk ashore.

There wasn't time to change, and we landed in uniform. After about an hour's walk uphill we found ourselves on the edge of a steep and high cliff. From this eminence a man was looking with great interest down at the *Ophir*. He stood by himself, with another couple of men watching him intently from a little way off. There was something odd in the grouping of the trio, and the thought flashed into my mind that the solitary fellow was a mental case, and the other two were his keepers. When we got near him he beckoned us.

"That is an English ship?" he asked, with a slightly foreign accent. I had seen him somewhere before. He fired questions at us about the ship's tonnage, her draught, the horse-power of her engines, and about other points with a knowledge of maritime matters and an acuteness which indicated that he was anything but a mental case. When he had exhausted his interest in the ship he asked us if we were officers in her, and what was our rank. We told him our standing, and he bowed slightly and left us. We continued our walk. We hadn't gone very far when the two men who had been standing by came up to us. They took off their hats and bent in sweeping bows, to which, English fashion, we replied with stiff and sketchy salutes.

"Do you know, gentlemen," one of them said, "with whom you have been conversing?"

I said that I knew the gentleman's face, I thought, but that I could not remember his name.

"That, sir," said he, "was his Imperial Majesty the German Emperor."

It then came to my mind that for a number of years the Kaiser had been in the habit of spending his summers in cruising the fjords in his yacht *Meteor*. And, sure enough, when we came to the bend in the fjord there the *Meteor* lay at anchor. When the surgeon and myself got back to the *Ophir* we found a message waiting for us that we were invited to take tea with his Imperial Majesty on the *Meteor*. A boat to convey us to the yacht was alongside the ship.

By that time the presence of the Imperial yacht in the fjord had been noticed, and permission had been sought and

granted for the *Ophir* passengers to look over her. That fact added a touch of comedy, for the doctor and myself were practically piped aboard by way of a cleared accommodation-ladder, and conducted solemnly to a roped-off section aft. And there, under the curious and envying glances of our passengers, not to mention a few of our shipmates, we were ministered to by gorgeous and obsequious flunkys. What made the affair even more splendid were the friendliness and the informality of the Kaiser's hospitality to us. It put my companion and myself quite at ease with him, and we talked together in comfortable fashion with plain "yes" and "no," and with small attention to titles. The doctor's stock and mine went up a good deal on the *Ophir* after that.

On a later cruise in the same region I had an adventure ashore of another sort. An actor who was among the passengers asked me to go ashore with him. We were going for a good long walk. Hunger fell upon us both after a walk of about six miles, and I suggested finding some place where we could eat. My companion said he could not speak Norwegian, but wagered he could make himself understood anywhere by mime.

We came on a cottage a little off the trail.

"Ah!" said my actor friend. "What about some nice boiled eggs and a cup of tea?"

"Admirable," said I. "But how do we go about getting them?"

"I'll show you."

He led the way to the shack and knocked at the door. It was opened by a woman with a singularly gnarled and hard-looking countenance. My companion rubbed his stomach and made a wry face. Then he sat on his heels and made a noise like a cackling hen, turning thereafter to pick up an imaginary egg and show it to the woman. She looked mystified for a moment or two; then a gleam of intelligence came into her eyes. She ran into the house for a minute and dashed back again. Then, gripping the actor by a wrist, she rushed him up the garden path, pushed him into a little wooden hut, and slammed the door on him!

§ iii

The business of life—living, loving, dying, being born—goes on aboard a big liner much in the same way, generally, as it happens ashore. The doctor would have pretty well the same general practice as he would find in a town or village. The third-class children might present him with an outbreak of measles to tackle, and all round he would be offered fine clinical experience. But, though I have mentioned births, the doctor's skill in midwifery was not, I remember, exercised really often. That, women readers will understand, is only natural. The one ship-born baby that I do remember is fixed in my mind from the odd way in which his parents insisted on naming him. He was born aboard the *Osterley* when that ship was in the Gulf of Suez. He was christened by a bishop who was among the passengers, and went into the register as "James Osterley Suez Martin."

Love affairs, it may be readily believed, were by no means uncommon, especially in the third class. I mean love affairs that came to anything. In the days of which I am telling ship laundries had not been installed, and some of the young male emigrants, not too lavishly equipped, would be at need to wash their socks and shirts themselves. As often as not some young woman would offer to do the job, producing in due course the garments properly washed and ironed. Gratitude on the part of the thumbless male, propinquity and female lure would do the rest, and another engagement would be heard of. Fairly frequently the engaged pair, on a fallacy still quite extensively prevalent, would put forward the notion of being married aboard. But the captain of a British ship, contrary to the popular belief, cannot perform the marriage ceremony. All we could do for such eager couples was to announce the banns on three succeeding Sundays at morning church, and cable the agent at the next convenient port to arrange for a wedding on arrival.

Apropos of people wanting the captain to marry them, I am reminded of an affair on an Australian trip which had some touches of drama.

WITH THE CORNERS OFF

The ship had just left Tilbury. I was walking across the third-class deck when I saw a man and woman in earnest conversation. What caught my attention was the demeanour of the couple—the man's shifts from pleading to coldness, and the woman's obvious sullenness as she gazed out to sea.

We arrived at Marseilles, got the bulk of our first-class passengers aboard, and sailed. We had been out of port less than an hour when this woman came to me in a very excited state. She wanted me to have the ship stopped. Her husband had not come aboard. Inquiries were made, and it was discovered that there was, in fact, a third-class passenger missing. It was possible that the man had got drunk in Marseilles and missed the ship, and I told the woman that her husband would most likely report to the agent, who would send him on to join the ship at Naples. At that port, however, there was no sign of the man, nor any message.

Greatly distressed, the woman wanted to go ashore and make inquiries, but then decided to go as far as Port Said with us. If no news came to her there she would go back to England. I promised in the meantime to cable our agent at Marseilles to investigate the matter.

We arrived at Port Said, and had been there about half an hour when I heard the sound of violent sobbing outside my cabin. I naturally opened the door, and there was the deserted lady, with tears streaming down her cheeks, holding out a blue cable-form.

“Read this, please!” she wept.

The message ran:

Please inform Mrs Edwards the dead body of her husband found in the street in Paris.

PREFECT OF PARIS POLICE

I did what I could to console the woman, and asked her what she would like to do. She did not know quite what to do, but finally decided to continue the voyage to Australia. Her passage had been paid, and there was nothing she could do if she did go back.

The story went all over the ship, and the tragic widow came in for a lot of sympathy.

I GO TO SEA

The ship had just passed through the Gulf of Aden, when, going aft one day, I came upon a crowd of passengers grouped about a deck-chair. In the chair—holding court, as it were—was the disconsolate lady. She was got up in a complete outfit of widow's weeds, which enhanced rather than detracted from her fair-haired and quite considerable good looks. It wasn't until I got back to my cabin that the oddness of her having such a rig among her luggage dawned upon me. And then it occurred to me that the cable she had shown me was signed merely "Prefect of Paris Police."

Next morning a second-class passenger sought an interview with me. He told me that he was a widower returning to his farm in Western Australia. He was very concerned, he said, about the poor woman who had lost her husband so tragically, and he wanted permission to go over to the third class to talk to her. I gave him the permission.

A week later the lady herself sought an interview. She wanted to know if I could arrange for the captain to perform a wedding ceremony. A second-class passenger had fallen in love with her and proposed an immediate marriage.

There was, to my mind, something fishy somewhere. A good look at the lady confirmed me in the suspicion.

"Shut the door," I said, "and sit down."

When the door was fast and she was seated I went on, "Now, just what is your game?"

The brusqueness of it had effect. She burst into tears.

"Please, please help me all you can!" she pleaded. "I'm—I'm like a drowning woman clutching at a straw! The man I came aboard with wasn't my husband. We had been living together in London, and I'd been keeping him. He first suggested we should go to Australia together. We were to get married and start a new life. But when we got on the ship his whole manner changed. He became restless. Then he told me quite brutally what his real idea was. There would be a lot of young men going out in the ship to Australia—single men—and in six weeks I'd have a lot of chances. If I couldn't rope one of them, he said, I wasn't the woman he thought I was. I tried to plead with him, but he wouldn't listen to me. He was

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cruel. He said he was going to leave the ship at Marseilles and send a telegram that would look as if it came from the police, saying he was dead. I was to get myself a widow's dress at Marseilles or Naples and have it in readiness.

"I tried everything I could to dissuade him," the woman wept, "but it was no use. It would be better for me, he said, to do just as I was told. I'd be shot of him, and could look after myself, but I had better go about things in a way that would be easy. He was through with me anyhow. That was the last thing he said to me. He was something well through with me!"

She finished with the tears streaming down her face and with her hands out in a way that was pitiable. I made up my mind. It was plain that she had had a pretty raw deal, and the man who wanted her was elderly and a widower, while she was still comparatively young. I made her swear on the Bible lying on my desk that she was telling me the truth. She did that, and I promised to help her.

The marriage came off at Fremantle on our arrival. Every time after that when my ship docked in the port a big car would drive up, and the elderly farmer and his young wife would come aboard carrying baskets of fruit and flowers, and take me off to have lunch or dinner with them ashore. Their marriage was a success.

§ iv

Among my shipmates in the Orient Line there was an executive officer who, having just completed his year's training with the Royal Navy, had acquired great notions of correctness in uniform. He was what is called a stickler. The ship we were in got a new doctor one voyage, and when this fresh shipmate made his first appearance, all neat and natty in newly tailored uniform, it was seen that he sported a very fine moustache. This was a sight that the R.N.R. officer went simply goosey over, for didn't the King's Regulations require either a full set of face fungus—beard and moustache—or else a complete shave? He had made the surgeon's acquaintance only about ten minutes when he tackled him on the matter.

I GO TO SEA

"Excuse me, doctor," he insinuated, "but you are not in correct uniform."

The doctor's reaction showed just what a swell he had been thinking himself in his new get-up. It was his first voyage.

"What's the matter with it?" he asked.

"I refer," said the Reserve bloke, "to that thing on your upper lip. You can't wear that with uniform. You must either shave or grow a beard."

He might, of course, have given the hint less broadly. The moustache, as moustaches go, was a triumph. It was plain that the medico was proud of it. He told the R.N.R. officer what he thought of hairless boys who could not mind their own business, indicated his intention of neither shaving nor growing a beard, and went off on his lawful occasions.

The R.N.R. man, however, could not reconcile himself to the lip fungus. True it is that as the days of the voyage slipped by he forgot to shudder every time he saw that double sweep of hair under the uniform cap, but it was obvious that he had not given over brooding about it. Going on or off duty, he would put himself in the doctor's way, stare for a moment incredulously, and wander away with an air of settled melancholy.

The doctor and myself got into the habit of retiring daily to the smoke-room after lunch for a game at piquet, with a glass of port as the stake. As we approached the tropics the R.N.R. man developed an interest in the game. He would come into the smoke-room to watch us play, though he would never cut in, and occasionally he would offer us a second glass of port. He was particularly pressing one scorcher of an afternoon. It was his birthday, he said, and he wanted the doctor and myself to drink his health. We said we would like to, and, our glasses being charged, we wished him many happy returns. As I left the smoke-room I heard the youngster press the medico to have just one more. The doctor must have been willing, and possibly he returned the compliment, for it was fully half an hour later that I saw him retire to his cabin for his 'watch below'—otherwise his afternoon nap.

WITH THE CORNERS OFF

At about four o'clock, at which hour the doctor was usually roused to take a cup of tea, his servant came running along to my cabin. The doctor, he said, would like to see me at once. The urgent nature of the message might have alarmed me, but there was a suppressed snigger in the servant's tone which told me the matter was, at least, not one of gravity. I hopped along to the doctor's cabin, and found him walking—or rather stamping—backward and forward with a hand over one side of his face.

"Hullo, doc!" I said. "Got neuralgia?"

His servant gurgled hysterically and bolted from the room.

"Neuralgia—neuralgia!" fumed the doctor. "D'you know who did this?"

And he withdrew the hand from his face. One wing of his luxuriant moustache had been clipped off almost flush with the skin. I could not help myself. The lop-sided effect on that face of indignation and woe was too much for me. I hooted with laughter. I hooted still more when the doctor showed me the raped half of his whiskers laid out neatly on a paper on his table. And the more indignant he declared himself the more I hooted. But after a time we both simmered down. I tried to soothe the man. I persuaded him to cover the remaining half of his moustache so that I might judge how he looked without it. Just then the R.N.R. man came into the cabin, looking as if butter would not have melted in his mouth.

"Well, well, well!" he said mildly. "So you've got round to my way of thinking at last, have you, doc? I must say it is a great improvement."

The doctor could play poker. He smiled. He accepted the joint persuasion of the R.N.R. fellow and myself that he would look much better clean-shaven, and he even allowed the youngster to cut off the remaining wing of the ruined trimming. The two halves were carefully gummed to a postcard, and that night they were raffled in the smoke-room, realizing four shillings and sixpence for the benefit of Mercantile Marine charities.

I had a visit from the Reserve officer some days later. He looked rather concerned about something.

I GO TO SEA

"See anything funny about me, pusser?" he asked.

"Nothing funnier than normal," I said, having looked him over. "What's the matter?"

He rubbed his hand over his head and held it out open-fingered for me to look at it.

"I believe I'm going bald," he said. "Look! My hair's coming out in handfuls!"

His thatch did seem to be thinning a bit on his forehead, and I advised a call on the doctor. We went along to the dispensary together.

"Ah!" said the doctor, after a careful examination, and he grinned widely. "Remember telling me when I first joined the ship that officers didn't wear hair on their faces? You'll improve on that presently. You're going to be like a boiled egg."

The R.N.R. man looked distressed. "Can't something be done about it, doc?" he asked anxiously. "I'm sorry if I appeared rude to you."

"The only treatment I can suggest is that you should have your hair close-cropped, really close-cropped, and give your scalp massage—what they call hair-drill—night and morning. But why not try to buy that moustache of mine from the fellow who won it in the raffle? It would make an excellent quiff, gummed on, when your hair's gone."

There was a prolonged visit of the barber to the officer's cabin that afternoon.

In those days the dining-saloon of the ships of the line was set out with long tables. The captain, doctor, and purser sat at the ends, and the junior officers were distributed among the passengers. My seat was at the far end of the captain's table. We had started dinner when the young officer appeared after his interview with the barber. I didn't see him take his seat, but a woman near me tittered. There was cause enough. The ruddy face of the youngster was topped by a dome of glossy white, and the effect was like that pink and white coconut-ice which children delight in buying.

Next evening when he took his place there were yelps from the ladies nearest to him. An inveterate joker—as his trick

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with the surgeon's moustache might indicate—he had got the bosun to paint a big spider on the top of his cranium. He had a marvellously flexible scalp, and when he bent forward and moved it the spider made most lifelike movements. In spite of the noise made by the passengers the Old Man seemed to see nothing of what was going on. The following evening, however, the young fellow turned up to dinner with a couple of flags painted on his dome—the Union Jack and the company's house-flag—and he contrived by the wriggling of his scalp to make them seem to flutter in a breeze. This time the skipper spotted him, and sent for him after dinner. He was ordered to take his meals in his cabin until enough hair had grown to make his dome useless as a canvas for the ship's artist. The treatment recommended by the doctor was effective. By the next voyage the young fellow's hair was as strong and thick as it ever had been.

X

QUEER HAPPENINGS

A PART from the eccentricity which seems to overtake even normally minded people when they get to sea, no liner starts off on a long voyage without its share of really odd personalities.

I was accosted one morning on an Australian run by a passenger on the promenade deck.

"Can you tell me," he asked, holding his hands out about two and a half feet apart, "where I could get a piece of nice string this length?"

"Certainly," said I. "The ship's office will supply you."

He went off with an air of great importance. In the office later I asked the writer if he'd had a visit from a passenger wanting string.

"Yes, sir," said the writer. "He said you had sent him. Queer bird. He was so particular about the string being the exact length. I gave him one piece—cut it for him carefully. Then he asked for another and another, until I'd cut him about a dozen lengths. After that he wanted a bottle of black ink. I told him there was plenty of black ink in the public rooms, but he said he needed a bottle for himself, because he was working in his cabin. Well, you've always said that passengers were to be obliged as far as possible, so I got a bottle and let him have some ink."

"That was right," I said. "Probably he has a number of presents for friends in Australia, and doesn't want the trouble of addressing and wrapping them up in the public rooms."

The incident passed from my mind. Then perhaps a couple of days later the bar steward put himself in my way.

"Excuse me, sir," he whispered. "Don't look at once, but do you know anything about that gentleman sitting by himself on the port side?"

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I took a casual glance. It was the man who had wanted the string.

"Anything to report about the passenger?" I asked.

"Well, sir, it's this way. He's becoming a bit of a nuisance. He will pester me for the wire off the soda-water bottles. He's always in my rubbish bin looking for it."

"What does he want the wire for?"

"I dunno, sir. He just straightens the pieces out and puts them away careful-like in an envelope."

I looked in to see the doctor. "Any special note of cases this voyage, doc?"

"There's one—a passenger whose doctor sent me a note about him—chap with a nervous breakdown. I haven't had time to look him up yet."

The name of this passenger was no surprise to me. It was that of the string collector. I asked the doctor to check up on him straight away, and led him to the smoke-room. The passenger had retired to his cabin, and we went after him.

Our knock evoked a cordial "Come in!" We found the chap in his shirt-sleeves.

"Ah, good morning, officers!" he said. "To what am I indebted for this honour?"

The doctor produced the letter of introduction, and we got to talking.

"D'you mind if I get along with my work?" the passenger said, after a few moments. "We can talk just as well."

I took the opening. "What are you working at?"

"You'll be surprised when I tell you—it's so ingenious, I think," the passenger replied, becoming quite animated. "You see these pieces of string? Well, I dip them in this bottle of ink and dye them black. Then I hang them over this rod to dry. When they're quite dry I put a piece of wire through one end and twist it into a spiral. When I repeat the process at the other end I have, you see, a very fine bootlace. By the time we get to Australia I'll have made enough of them to pay my passage money."

A wink from the doctor gave me the hint to leave. I hung round to hear his verdict.

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"He'll want watching," said the doctor. "He's fairly safe as he is, but he might easily get worse. I'm not too easy in my mind about him."

While I was playing deck quoits the next morning the quartermaster asked if he could speak to me privately. I withdrew with him to the ship's rail. One of the passengers, he said, was behaving "queer-like." He described the string collector.

"What's the trouble?"

"Well, sir," said the quartermaster, "in a manner of speakin', it suits me all right. This 'ere passenger, sir, 'e comes up to me early one morning larst week and 'e pulls me by the sleeve. 'Sailorman,' ses 'e, 'd'yer see that there big feller sittin' in the third chair?' I takes a dekkko, sir, and, blow me! there ain't nobody in the chair at all. But I thought I'd better humour 'im. 'Yus, sir,' I ses. 'Wot abahrt 'im?' 'That,' the passenger whispers solemn-like, 'that's me worst enemy. Throw 'im over the ship's side!' 'ses 'e.

"Well, sir, it's a queer go, but I slips along an' pretends to pick up the bloke as wasn't there an' slings 'im over into the ditch. My word, sir, but wasn't 'is nibs pleased abahrt it! 'E grins all over 'is face. 'Thanks a lot,' ses 'e, an' 'e slips me a quid."

"Yes," I said. "Anything further?"

"Well, sir, 'e's done it four times again since. Ses I'm 'is bodyguard. As soon as 'e spots an enemy I 'eaves 'im overboard an' gets a quid."

There was a conference in the captain's cabin that evening, and the bootlace-maker was sent home from the next port of call in charge of a male nurse.

We were sailing for England from Sydney at noon one Saturday. In the middle of the morning's bustle and rush a steward came to me and said that a lady was waiting to see me in my cabin. I swore, but went along. A well-dressed woman got up from a chair as I entered and introduced herself.

"I am Mrs Brown-Smith, and I'm sailing with you to Europe."

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"Quite right, madam," said I. "I have seen your name on the berthing list."

She peered round the cabin furtively, then closed the door.

"I ought to tell you," she whispered, "that I'm travelling with a Mrs Smith-Brown, who is a confirmed dipsomaniac. Her doctor asked me to look after her."

"That's very kind of you, madam. Do you know her well?"

"Not at all. Her doctor heard from a mutual friend that we were going to Europe by the same ship, and he asked that I might be put in her cabin."

I promised that we would do everything to help her, and I went off.

We cast off at the appointed hour, with the usual crowd to watch the fine spectacle of a large passenger ship leaving the wharf. The actual bustle of leaving being over, I went to my cabin. I hadn't been there very long when there was a knock at the door and another well-dressed woman appeared.

"I'm Mrs Smith-Brown," she said. "I'm travelling with Mrs Brown-Smith."

So this, I said to myself, is the dipsomaniac. But I tried to appear casual.

"Yes, madam," I said. "You are both coming with us to England."

"Then you know all about it," said she. "Isn't it sad?"

"We'll do all we can to help you," I murmured.

"Thank you," she said briskly. "I suppose I had better tell the ship's doctor?"

This rather took me aback. Something odd was toward. I couldn't imagine a confirmed dipsomaniac wanting to confess her weakness to the doctor.

"I do think he ought to know in case she breaks out while on board," the lady continued.

"What will you tell him?" I fenced.

"Oh, the plain and simple fact that Mrs Brown-Smith is a morphia fiend. Her doctor, hearing from a mutual friend that I was going to England by this ship, begged that I would share her cabin and keep an eye on her."

And the odd situation was genuine. Both women, one a

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drunkard and the other a dope addict, had been given the office of acting as angel to the other. The dipsomaniac came with us to Europe, much to the delight of the crew, with whom she became very friendly, but the drug fiend became so bad that she had to be landed. The doctor's main difficulty with her was to discover the source of her supplies. It was the stewardess who found it—done up in her hair.

I remember a passenger in the *Osterley* in no way eccentric except for a rather overweening pride and his manner of dressing. He was, they said, quite a prominent personality in Edinburgh, and he was well known in Melbourne. He claimed, I heard, to be chieftain of a Scottish clan, but the name he bore, while historic enough and distinguished in Victorian history, was not one which gave any countenance to the claim. In virtue of it, however, he wore full Highland dress all the time, with velvet doublet, jabot, belted plaid, dirk, and *sgean dhu*. He kept his fine white hair long, almost to his shoulders, and in face he was rather like Cardinal Newman. He was, as I've said, terrifically proud, and he held himself solitary.

"Who's the old boy in the Scotch get-up?" asked a fellow-passenger.

"Don't you know?" returned the junior officer addressed. "That's Harry Lauder's uncle."

"What's he doing here?"

"He's a new member of the ship's band."

The rage of the old boy may be imagined when the callow passenger asked to be obliged on the first opportunity with *Stop your Ticklin', Jock!* The Lauder fan had a real sample of Caledonia stern and wild.

§ ii

I had been asleep for a considerable time one night when I was awakened by the clinking of the rings of my cabin curtain. Some one, I became aware, was creeping into the room. I lay quite still but with my eyes open, and as they grew accustomed to the darkness I saw a young man. He was bending over me, peering into my face. The feeling this created was

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not comfortable, and the electric switch was something beyond arm's stretch. But to continue staring at each other through the gloom was impossible, so I sat up and reached across the cabin to the switch.

With the light I recognized the intruder. It was a young fellow whom I had often noticed wandering alone about the ship. At that moment he seemed to be in a daze. He was carrying several sheets of the ship's notepaper.

"Will you please allow me to stop with you here until daylight?" he said, after a moment or two. "It's imperative that I should keep awake. Please keep talking to me. Talk on any subject you choose. But keep talking to me."

I thought I had better humour him and discover what his trouble was. He did not look mad, but he was very pale and very much in earnest. I got up, donned a dressing-gown, and rang the bell for the steward. If the young fellow wanted to keep awake coffee would be a help.

Coffee and biscuits were brought, and I told my visitor to make himself comfortable. I thought it would not be long before he explained himself.

"You must please forgive me," he began at last, "but you're the only officer I dared come to in such horrible circumstances."

He sat with his head to one side, as though listening for some one, and the trembling of his hand made the papers rustle.

"I went to my cabin at ten this evening," he went on, after a pause, "and I turned in at once, falling into a deep sleep almost immediately. Half an hour ago I woke up feeling cold. It took me some minutes to make out where I was, and then I discovered that I was in my pyjamas at a table in the writing-room. In front of me were sheets and sheets of ship's paper on which I had been writing—these!" And he held out the pages for my inspection. "Look!" he said. "The ink is barely dry on the last page."

It was obvious that the pages were newly written.

"You must've been walking in your sleep," I ventured.

He forced some of the sheets on me. I was reluctant to

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inspect them closely, imagining he might have written a love-letter or something of the sort. The disturbance of his mind might have come from some unfortunate love affair. But he insisted that I should take them.

I glanced at the sheets casually to begin with, then intently, for the writing was in some sort of script of which I could make neither head nor tail. But a recurrence of similar characters time and again showed that it was not gibberish.

"What language is it, anyhow?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said, bewildered. "I simply don't know."

I sat down now to give the pages closer consideration. It was plain that the young fellow was in dead earnest. Together we tried to make something out of the script. It was beautifully put down—an educated calligraphy—but language and script were completely different from ours.

I put the papers away in a drawer and kept the young fellow talking until daylight. He told me that at times he was under the influence of another personality. It did not trouble him when his mind was actively employed in seeing, hearing, and thinking to any purpose. But when his mind was vacant it passed into the possession of a dominating personality, and was used for purposes that he knew were evil. When day broke the young fellow thanked me and went off to bath and dress.

Among the passengers on that voyage was the Hon. Maurice Baring. He had just left St Petersburg, and was going on a visit to Lord Islington in New Zealand. I knew of this gentleman's distinction in letters, and had heard he was a fine linguist. After breakfast that morning I sought him out and asked him to come to my cabin to look at the papers. He glanced at them.

"I didn't know, Mr Purser," he said at once, "that you were a Russian scholar."

"Nor am I, sir," I replied. "I don't know a word of the language. Will you read the stuff for me?"

He scanned the first few lines. Then he stacked the sheets and handed them to me. "I won't read any more," he said.

"Why? Is it indecipherable?"

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"Not at all. It is clearly, even beautifully written. Who wrote it?"

I related the circumstances, and asked him what the writing was about.

"I have never read such blasphemy," said Mr Baring. "Here are filthy ravings against the orthodox religions of civilization—the ravings of a brilliant but perverted soul, in whom honour and every decent emotion are dead. The things set out here are unspeakable!"

I thanked him, and he begged to be allowed to keep one sheet as a curiosity.

Later I discovered that my nocturnal visitor had been under treatment by a doctor-scientist whose name is still a household word, a man who had devoted a great deal of time to study of the occult. He had advised the passenger to take the voyage for health's sake. The strange thing was that the young fellow maintained—I believe myself genuinely—that he did not know a word of Russian.

I reported the whole affair fully to the ship's doctor, who took the young man in charge. He had to be put ashore at Port Said and sent back with the next homeward-bound ship.

§ iii

One of our stewards was in sick-bay with double pneumonia. We were in the Red Sea at the time, and the heat was a thing of dread, a burden even for the fit. The doctor came to me one evening and said that I had better take a dying statement from the sick steward. His temperature was over a hundred and five, and he wouldn't live another day. I went along to the hospital and saw the man, and asked him if there was anything I could do for him. He seemed to be aware that he was dying, and he asked me to take messages for his wife and his mother.

As I left the hospital I was accosted by another steward.

"Any hope, sir?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not," I replied. "The doctor has given the poor chap up."

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"I come from the same village as he does, sir," said the steward. "We were at school together. Could I go in and stop with him?"

"Better ask the doctor. Come along to his cabin."

The doctor, after a question or two, readily gave the needed permission. As I was leaving the cabin with the man he halted me.

"Would you please give me an order on the storekeeper, sir," he begged, "for a gallon of vinegar, to be charged up to me?"

"What do you want it for?" I asked, naturally enough.

"Well, sir, the doctor has given up all hope. I'd like to see what I can do."

The request was a strange one, but the man looked so eager and anxious that I wrote out the order to the storekeeper and gave it to him.

Next morning I had a visit from the doctor.

"I thought the age of miracles had passed," he said, "but something vastly like one has happened on this ship. That steward chap is going to recover. I found him this morning in a beautiful natural sleep, with his temperature nearly back to normal."

I said nothing about the sick man's friend, but passed the word, when the doctor had gone, for him to come to my cabin. He appeared with a face that was simply radiant.

"Harry's going to get better, sir!" he cried.

"So the doctor tells me. What did you do, Russell?" I asked.

"I took all the clothes off him, sir, and bathed him from head to foot with the vinegar. That brought his body temperature down a little. Then I took him in my arms and willed him to get well."

In less than a week the sick man was sitting out on deck, convalescing.

There was another strange case on the same ship. Two sisters who were emigrating to Australia went ashore at Naples and indulged themselves with a surfeit of over-ripe or unclean fruit. Both were taken seriously ill, and were placed

in the ship's hospital. The part of the deck where the hospital stood was roped off to ensure quiet.

I was on the third-class deck one afternoon when I was accosted by a tall, white-bearded man.

"Excuse me," said he. "Are you the ship's doctor?"

"No. Do you want him?"

"I think he had better go to the hospital at once. One of those girls is dying."

"How do you know?" I demanded. "You understand very well that no one is allowed to pass that rope!"

He made no answer for a long moment or two, but stood gazing at the hospital.

"There is no real hurry for the doctor now," he said quietly. "The girl is dead."

I said that this was an extraordinary statement to make, and I asked the man what he meant by it.

"I haven't been past the rope," he murmured. "I have been watching the astral body striving to leave the flesh. It has just succeeded. I'd have called the doctor earlier, but I saw that the struggle had reached a stage when anything he might have done would have been useless."

I hurried to the doctor's cabin and told him what the bearded man had said. We made straight for the hospital together. One of the girls was dead, and the doctor said she had died only five minutes previously.

§ iv

The *prima donna* of the opera company we were transporting Europeward from Australia was a very lovely lady indeed, and a sweet singer. She was bringing goods with her that could not be counted as luggage, but had to go as cargo, and when I was arranging with her for the carriage she made an odd mistake. Instead of handing me the bill of lading she passed over what looked to me like a marriage certificate. The quick sight of that document made subsequent events on the voyage look rather strange.

It appeared, as the *Osterley* approached Colombo, that the

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lady was contemplating a breakage of her contract with the opera company. The manager of the company was very irate about it, for he had bookings in England and elsewhere that depended greatly on the appearance of the *prima donna* in some of the principal rôles. She was the star, in fact, round which his galaxy of artists moved as satellites. The strange thing was the lady's reason for wanting to break her contract—strange in view of the marriage certificate. Her story was that a gentleman was coming down from Calcutta to meet her at Colombo, and they were to be married at the English church there. According to the lady, at second-hand from the irate manager, everything had been arranged.

The storm between the *prima donna* and the manager, and the prospect for the members of the company of being left in the lurch by their star, looked like making the voyage unhappy generally, so that when the manager asked me to see if I could do something, I remembered the sight of the marriage certificate and sought an interview with the *prima donna*, thinking that the lady might be up to some game which would perhaps let her accept more favourable terms in another contract. I told her I had noticed the nature of the paper she had handed me at Fremantle, and that I couldn't see how she possibly could get married, unless bigamously, in Colombo.

The lady took my interference calmly. She even smiled about it. The certificate I had seen was concerned only with a civil marriage. She had married the man she loved in a hurry, on a sudden determination, he being on the point of leaving for India. But she would not consider herself really married until the ceremony was performed at the altar. Her man had been pressing her for quite a while to join him in India, but her engagements had been in the way. Now she was tired of appearing in public. Her contract with the opera company meant nothing to her. She wanted to settle down in private life. Everything was arranged. Her man was meeting her at Colombo. They were to be married, and she was returning with him to India. It was useless for the manager to be angry with her. Her mind was made up.

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We arrived at Colombo. In the midst of my concerns connected with making the port I had time for a word with the *prima donna*. Her eyes were sparkling; she was full of glee. She had received a letter from her husband. He was coming out to meet her, she said, in the pilot-boat.

If that was the case, I thought, the fond lover had been remiss. He had missed the pilot-boat, for it had been that craft which had brought the mails, among which was her letter, out to the ship. I said nothing to the lady, however, not wishing her to feel any disappointment. The husband would correct his error one way or another, and would presently appear. I went about my duties.

We berthed at Colombo, and the ship emptied as the passengers snatched the opportunity of seeing the incomparable beauties of Ceylon. The *prima donna*, however, was not among those who went ashore. Her husband had not yet appeared. It was not until several hours had passed that I had an opportunity for concerning myself with the anxieties of the now quite disconsolate lady. But as soon as I had a chance to think of her my anxiety became as real as her own. I knew that the ship of the Clan Line on which her man was coming down from Calcutta had been due in Colombo long before the *Osterley*—a day or two ahead, in fact. According to schedule it had already been in Colombo and had sailed for England. It was very likely, indeed, that the letter the lady had received had come down from Calcutta by that very same ship.

Something had happened. I dissembled my anxiety for her when I went to see the singer. Was she sure that her man had been coming down from Calcutta in the ship she had mentioned? She said she was positive, not only that he had been coming to Colombo by the liner in question, but that he had intended to come out to meet the *Osterley* in the pilot-boat.

"Just for certainty's sake, madam," I said, "and so that I may know what to do to help you, would you mind letting me see the lines in your husband's letter where he mentions the ship and the pilot-boat?"

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She dived into her handbag and produced the letter. First she showed me the name of the ship it was addressed from. It was the Clan liner she had spoken of. Then she unfolded the letter to show me the lines about the pilot-boat.

My heart sank for her when I saw the reference, for the husband had quoted from Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar*: "I hope to see my Pilot face to face . . ."

It was without much expectation of getting any good word that I put through an inquiry to the Clan Line agent. The line in the letter could admit of only one interpretation, I thought. It could be taken to express only one intention. And the answer from the Clan Line office confirmed my fears. The singer's husband had been missed from the ship on the voyage from Calcutta.

It was hard to convince the lady that there was little use in her stopping behind at Colombo, but she did sail with us for England.

A day or two out we overtook the Clan liner, and we signalled her. Could any information be given us regarding the passenger from Calcutta named Gale?

The answer came back: "Disappeared night of September 18; supposed suicide."

§ v

Signals from ship to ship at sea often deal with strange happenings, but one of the oddest I ever saw was also concerned with a Clan ship. It was in the days before wireless, while I was still in the *Ophir*. I have said, I think, that this pretty model of a ship was expensive to run. The ordinary concern of the chief engineer with that mysterious thing 'slip' and with coal consumption was in her case greatly exacerbated. The man in charge of her motive-power was always peering out to have a look at her wake, and any deviation from a straight course got out of him the deepest-throated growls, and a demand that a quartermaster who knew his job should be put at the wheel. If it was ever necessary to close with a ship to exchange signals the chief engineer could be heard muttering horridly.

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He was indulging in his habitual grouse one day over the curved wake which marked our veer to close with a turret-ship of the Clan Line which was flying the general signal 'J.' The 'J' meant that the Clan liner wanted to communicate with us. Visibility was not too good, and we had to get well out of our course. The feelings of the engineer, and his reactions, may be imagined when the bunting broke out on the Clan ship's halyards with a request for the name of the winner of the Cesarewitch!

The need for keeping a straight, and therefore economical, course goes by the board when a captain sees a signal of distress. That is the way of the sea. And the sight of an Italian steamer with her ensign at half-mast had the usual effect on the commander of the *Osterley* one fine day. He altered course to close with the freighter, and sent up the signal asking if we could be of any assistance.

"No, thanks," came the reply.

"Who, then, is dead?" was our next question.

After quite a while the flags 'K-R-S-T' went up on the freighter. We went back to our course. But the last answer of the Italian steamer was a puzzler. None of the executive officers could translate it from memory. They hauled out the ABC and International code-books and went over the pages, but without coming on any combination of letters such as they had not seen, nor any so similar as to indicate a mis-reading.

I was in the chart-room, having been attracted by the sight of the ensign at half-mast, and by curiosity to know what it meant. And as I watched my shipmates feverishly conning the code-book pages my glance strayed to the calendar. Then I realized that the death those Italian seamen were mourning was one which had taken place some nineteen centuries before. The day was Good Friday.

§ vi

With seven hundred and fifty people on board it is the easiest thing in the world to mislay a passenger for twenty-

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four hours. It is a simple matter for some queer-minded person to stow himself away in some part of the ship or take to haunting the crew's quarters.

One Sunday morning on the *Ophir* a third-class steward came to me with word that one of his passengers had not slept in his bunk, and that the man had not been down to meals for three days. I had an immediate muster of the third-class people on deck and in the saloon. A check proved that the missing man was not among them.

The description of the man was extracted from his immigration papers and posted on all notice-boards, with a request for any information regarding him. These notices had been up for a couple of days when I had a call from a big Yorkshireman.

"Ah was readin' yon notice," he said.

"Well, have you any information on the subject?"

"Ah have an' Ah haven't, in a manner of speakin'."

It was no good, I saw, to try to hurry him. He had to tell what he knew in his own way or not at all.

"'Twere like this 'ere," he said slowly. "Saturday night t' band were playin' on our deck. Ah was listenin'-like, and t' young man was standin' by my side. He was readin' summat, an' Ah fancy he was cryin' a bit. Presently t' band gets to playin' loud-like, an' Ah turns to see 'ow conductor was doin'. Just then Ah hears a bit of a splash, an' Ah thinks to meself, 'There's a bit o' dunnage gone overboard.' Yesterday Ah see yon notice on t' board, an' Ah gets to thinkin' how t' young chap weren't there next time Ah looks round—just after that splash, you see. So Ah thought Ah'd come along an' tell you. Description reads like t' young feller Ah saw, an' Ah haven't seen 'im about since."

Suicide is contagious. On this same voyage our passage through the Red Sea was made in heat that was intolerable. The passengers spent most of the day lying in their cabins in the artificial breeze of their fans and punkahs. But the stokers had no such aid to coolness. To-day, with ventilating-fans and conditioned air all over ships of size, with special arrangements for engine-room and stokehold, things are not

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so bad. But in the days I'm telling of a stokehold in the tropics could be simply hell.

I was sitting on the after-hatch one evening after dinner with the second engineer, enjoying a quiet pipe. A fireman came up the engine-room ladder and took a seat near my companion. The engineer looked at the man.

"What the hell are you doing on deck?" he said. "Isn't it your watch below?"

"Yes, sir," the man returned; "but it's too hot for me down there."

Discipline required that the man should get back on duty. If one fireman got away with coming on deck the whole watch might come up in a bunch.

"No good, boy," said the engineer. "You'll have to get along down again."

"Say that again," said the fireman, "and I'll jump overboard."

The engineer repeated the order peremptorily.

Before we could do anything to stop him the man dashed to the rail and got on top of it. We were after him like a shot, and just as he jumped the engineer grabbed his wrist. I managed to seize his singlet at the neck, but as soon as it took his weight the flimsy fabric parted, and I was left with a sweat-rag and a portion of singlet in my fingers. I dropped the fragments and leaned over to help the engineer, but at that moment the man's sweaty wrist slipped from his grasp, and *plunk* down the side fell the fireman. It was useless to dive after him. It was almost dark, and the Red Sea is infested by sharks.

We gave the alarm at once. The engineer shinned down the ladder to the controls, and the engines were switched even before the signal came from the bridge. The accident boat was lowered. The ship came about in a circle, and the boat was dropped into the water to race towards the flare that blazed on the lifebuoy I had slung overboard after the fireman.

The *Ophir* had very large propellers, which stuck well out from her rudder-post, and it was a miracle that the fireman, falling so close to the side, escaped being chopped by them

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as he passed into the wake. Another miracle was his escape from the sharks. They were usually quick on such a chance. But with everything against him the man was back on board in less than ten minutes, snugly tucked into a cot in sick-bay.

That was two suicides, complete and attempted, in less than a fortnight. We ran out of the Gulf of Aden into the monsoon, and the constant rain left only one side of the ship with any comfort. The damp heat made life almost insupportable. Cape Guardafui was a day astern when there was brought to me a note which had been found in the second steward's cabin. It said that he was "going to end it all." He apologized for taking with him a big iron water-key, such as householders use ashore for cutting water off at the main. He was hanging it about his neck to help him to sink. He was never seen again, for he had stepped out of one of the cargo ports, his pipe being found on the ledge close by it.

The next man to disappear was a Scandinavian. He had made himself very popular with the other passengers, and there had been not the slightest indication in his manner that he contemplated suicide. It was a mystery to every one. I took an inventory of his effects, and abstracted one of his neckties. I wanted to make an experiment. When we arrived at Melbourne I got in touch with Mrs Stevens, a medium. When I went to see her I took the necktie with me. Mrs Stevens placed it on her forehead. She did not appear to go into any sort of trance, but after a moment or two she said, "This is the property of a Norwegian. He is a big blond man—or, rather, he *was* big and blond. He is now dead."

"Can you tell me how he died?" I asked.

"I see a small room. It is a water-closet. The big blond man is standing on the seat looking through a small window—a porthole in a ship. Oh! He is trying to climb through." She gave a scream. "He's getting through—he disappears—he has gone overboard!"

I thanked her and went back to the ship. I examined the closets. On one of the wooden seats there were nail-marks from a boot, and on the brass rim of the port were scorings

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such as might have been made by the buttons on a man's clothing.

The incident of the cook of the for'ard galley, though it actually happened several years later, may well be related here. It was in the s.s. *Friedrichsruhe*, sailing under the Armistice flag with troops to Australia after the War, and it happened pretty much in the same waters as those I have just been mentioning. The 'Diggers' regarded this repatriation voyage as a holiday trip. They were heroes homeward bound, and they lolled about the ship all day playing 'house' and euchre.

One tropic morning some of us were in the Old Man's quarters putting away long cool drinks after an inspection round of the ship. A tedious round, for the skipper had taken us into almost every corner, including the crew's quarters and the galleys. Suddenly a cry rang out: "Man overboard!" It fetched us on deck at once. The officer on watch had seen the man walk to the ship's side, climb on the rail, and take a header into the Indian Ocean. He had slung a lifebuoy after him immediately and put the wheel hard a-port.

The Diggers were crowding the rails. "Who's the bloody fool? Anybody know if it was a Digger?" They were vastly agog at the idea that it was one of their own mob who had gone over. Then the news passed: "Cook of the for'ard galley it was." The excitement of the Diggers abated rather. It was not one of their push, anyhow.

A look-out man had shinned to the crow's-nest, and a yell cut the general babble. "There he is! There he is!" And of course every one said, "Where? Where?"

The pointing of the keener-eyed was across the port quarter. And there the man was, swimming as hard as he could *towards* the ship. The accident boat was slipped and went off at speed to meet the swimmer, when the cry arose of "Sharks! Sharks!" The triangular fin of a man-eater could be seen tearing through the water in the direction of the swimmer. It was evident that the coxswain of the boat also saw the swimmer's peril, for he began to raise as much splash in the water as he could with the tiller, the idea being that sharks

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are easily scared by commotion near them. But this shark kept on, and it was a question of whether the man would reach the boat before the upturned belly flashed in the strike at the prey. The swimmer and the boat met. He just managed to grab the gun'le and flop inboard as the great white belly gleamed alongside. And even the ranks of Tuscany—which is to say, the cynical-minded Diggers—could scarce forbear to cheer.

"What man is it, Campbell?" asked the captain.

"Cook of the for'ard galley, sir."

"Why, bless my soul alive!" said the Old Man. "We've just been through that galley on inspection, haven't we?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know the fellow?"

"Very well, sir. I've sailed with him for a good many years," I said, "and I'd have put him down as the last man to do such a thing."

"Better go along, when the doctor's through with him, and have a talk to the fellow."

The rescue party came alongside, hooked on the falls, and boat and crew were hauled inboard. This is always a dramatic spectacle, and the ranks of Tuscany cheered again. The rescued was wrapped in blankets and carried to the sick-bay. The doctor came out in a little and reported, "He's all right now. Come along and talk to him."

When I got to the hospital the patient was sitting up in bed drinking something hot.

"How d'you feel now?" I inquired.

"Lor' lumme, sir, I nearly broke me bloomin' neck."

"What d'you mean, nearly broke your blooming neck?"

"When I 'it the bloody water, sir. Oughter 've known better, I 'ad. I once stepped orf a blinkin' tram in the Walworth Road opposite way the thing was goin', an' 'it the deck with a wallop. Nearly got run over. I forgot when I dived in to go the way the ship was movin'. If I 'ad I'd 've felt nothing. As it was, sir, I went straight aht an' nearly twisted me block orf!"

"What d'you mean by jumping overboard, anyhow?"

"It was the 'eat, sir," he said shamefacedly—"the perishin' 'eat."

"Don't try putting me off with that yarn," I said. "You've been through the tropics too many times. Let's have the truth."

"What's goin' to 'appen, sir?"

"I'm taking you ashore at Colombo. You'll be brought before a magistrate and charged with attempted suicide. And if heat bothers you you're going to find a Sinhalese prison perhaps hotter than hell."

"Attempted suicide, sir! Nothin' was ever furver from me mind, I'll swear it. Look 'ere, sir! If I gives you the Gawd's strewth abaht it, will you put in a good word for me wiv the cap'n?"

"I'll see," I said guardedly.

"Then I'll tell yer. It was this way, sir. Some of them Aussies is gettin' a bit bored with things. This mornin' a few of them comes to me. 'Ere, Cookie,' they ses, 'can't yer show us somethin' interestin'? Can't yer get up somethin' to amuse us?'

"'Well,' I ses, 'I *could* give yer a bit of a song an' dance.'

"'A-a-atcher!' they ses. 'That's no use. What we wants is somethin' excitin'. What's wrong wiv jumpin' overboard so's we can see yer bein' rescued?'

"'Talk sense,' I ses. 'There's only one for'ard cook on the ship, an' I'm 'im,' I ses, 'whereas,' I ses, 'there's quite a few 'undreds of you Aussies. What's the matter with one of *you* doin' it? Supposin' they didn't get yer back?' I ses. 'It'd be no great odds. You'd never be missed.'

"Well, sir," the cook concluded, "they walked away on that, but after a bit they comes back. 'See 'ere, Cookie,' they ses, 'we've 'ad a bit of a whip rahnd, an' we've collected over two quid. What abahrt 'oppin' overboard for that?' Well, sir, as you knows, I've got five kids at 'ome, an' a couple of quid looks pretty good to me. 'Give it 'ere!' I ses, an' I puts it in the ole corfee-pot. And after rahnds this mornin' over I goes!"

XI

SHARPS AND FLATS

A MEMBER of the peerage travelling to England came one day to the ship's office and asked me to cash a cheque.

"Of course, your lordship," I said. "For how much?"

"A hundred and fifty pounds."

That was more than I could find cash for immediately, for we did not keep a big balance in hand, but I said I would go ashore at Marseilles and get the money from the company's agent.

"I particularly wanted it before the ship arrived," said his lordship. "It is a debt of honour, and the people I owe it to are leaving the ship at that port."

"Have you been playing cards with strangers?" I asked.

He said he had been playing with two men. I said I could guess their names, and did so forthwith: Colonel Dash and Captain Blank.

"Yes," his lordship admitted, "those are the two gentlemen."

Well, now, the pair were international crooks, but during the voyage I had found no chance of bowling them out. They were too clever. I was, however, perfectly sure of my ground, and I told his lordship what they were. He flew into a great rage.

"How dare you suggest such a thing?" he demanded. "I'll have you know, Mr Purser, that one of the gentlemen you asperse was at Eton with me, and the other is a member of my club. I shall report your insolence to your director!"

And his lordship did just that. Fortunately for me, the management knew I would not accuse without reason, and no great trouble ensued. But I wonder if his lordship saw, as I did, the photograph of one of the crooks concerned that

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appeared six months later in a newspaper, with the intimation that he had got two years' imprisonment for swindling.

A ship carrying as many as two hundred first-saloon passengers forms a happy hunting-ground—one might almost say a Tom Tiddler's Ground—for the professional 'sharp.' In cities, where so many activities over a wide area present themselves as antidotes for boredom, the crook's casting about for prey is more chancy than it is on a ship, where the 'possibles' are closely bunched together.

The sharp works on a system. Invariably well turned out, he will walk into the West End office of a large shipping company and tackle the clerk of the passenger department. He is contemplating, he says, a voyage for his health, but wants to know something of the people with whom he will be travelling. He believes that friends have booked passages in the company's next ship. And might he have a glance at the passenger-list?

Quite impressed, the clerk will produce the passenger-list, and will probably go as far as to indicate the people of real quality appearing in it. That is all the sharp wants at the moment. Having stored in his usually excellent memory the names of likely 'pigeons,' he goes off with a promise to telephone about a berth later. But from the shipping office he goes straight to the nearest public library, where he spends an hour or two over *Who's Who* and *Whitaker*. He finds the school, college, and club of each of his selected victims or of the likeliest. He dodges round for information regarding the school, college, and club, buys an old school tie and a club one, and books his passage.

The sharps most often travel in pairs or trios, though some of them work alone. I know of one party which employed a beautiful woman as decoy. She was very well connected socially, and not at all of the crook class.

The first morning out the lady would appear on deck perfectly garbed, and it would not be long before the selected victim was in conversation with her. To pick up people on board ship is usually easy, and the lady had a technique of her own. At about eleven would come the suggestion from her

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new acquaintance of a cocktail in the lounge. The rest would be easy, for whom would the lady encounter in the lounge but her old friend Colonel Dash!

"Why, hallo, Colonel Dash! This is a pleasant surprise! I had no idea you were coming with us. I suppose you know Lord Pretsel?"

"I believe I was at Eton with you, sir, but you were then Gerald Hyssop. Let me see, now, wasn't . . ."

And with that the fleecing party would be well started.

Of course, there are numbers of sharps who trust to picking out their pigeons once they are aboard the ship. They play quiet and straight bridge with all and sundry until they have discovered the gamblers and the monied 'flats.' They do not cheat until it becomes absolutely necessary, and as often as not there is no need for them to swindle, for they are really first-class card-players. The sharps have a code. It does not matter to them whether they are partners or opponents; they can play into each other's hands. They use the simplest points for observance. How many people, for example, have the habit of sorting their bridge hands into suits, and the suit cards in order of value? The ordinary person, without being a crook, if he cares to watch can easily guess how many hearts, spades, or what not a player of this sort holds, and how many of a suit is left after a card from it is played. But if it comes to actual cheating the crooks have plenty of ways of telling confederates what they are holding or what they want played. The human face can so readily be treated as a clock dial, and a contemplative finger scratching this 'o'clock' or that can easily indicate the value of a card. Especially if the hand holding the cards rests for a moment over the heart, or descends to the table in the motion of a falling club.

Sharps have ways of identifying each other even if they have not already met. Usually the spotting of another on the same 'lay' requires no more than a look, and it would surprise the innocent to see through what guises the sharps can pick up a fellow-crook. (One of the cleverest card-swindlers that ever came into my ken was a mild-looking Catholic *padre*.)

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But if it does happen that there is some doubt a code phrase makes sure.

"Would you care to cut for a drink?"—that is one of the code phrases. If no notice is taken of it the fellow it is put to is obviously not of the fraternity.

§ ii

We had not long left Tilbury, and the stewards were unpacking and putting away the clothes of the passengers under their charge.

At six-thirty a steward came to me.

"I think it my duty to tell you, sir," he said, "when I was putting out the dinner clothes of a passenger three dice fell from his waistcoat-pocket. They were loaded dice, sir."

"Thank you, Richardson. You did right in telling me. What is the number of the cabin?"

"Seventeen, sir."

I had a look at the berthing-list and found the passenger's name. I put myself in the way of looking him over, and his looks did not please me at all. Dicing is not so popular in this country as it is in America, but there are sharpers who practise it on the Western Ocean in the season and in the Mediterranean and Egypt for the rest of the year.

After dinner that night I went to the smoke-room. It was full of men. When good opportunity came I rapped a table with my pipe.

"Gentlemen, I have to warn you to be careful with whom you play cards or games of chance," I announced. "There are sharpers on board."

I was watching Number Seventeen carefully, if unobtrusively, but he gave no sign of being galled. I did not really expect him to. I went out.

Half an hour later I was passing the smoke-room again, and I saw Number Seventeen drinking with a youngster whom I knew to be from a wealthy family. The boy sent for a pack of cards, and they started cutting for drinks. I had a notion that this pursuit would soon develop into a gamble. A

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very little later I saw the lad come out on deck, and I went over to say I hoped he was going to enjoy his trip.

"I've made a damn' bad start," he said.

"How's that?"

"Just had two of the most expensive drinks I've ever swallowed."

"You don't mean to tell me you've been gambling after what I said in the smoke-room to-night?"

"I've just lost fifty pounds cutting for quids."

He had walked right into it, for the average crook can cut high or low as he pleases, especially from a new pack. I am not myself a crook, but I can guarantee to cut an ace or a court card every time.

I spoke to the captain about Number Seventeen.

"Put him ashore at Marseilles!" ordered the Old Man.

By the time we were approaching that port, however, the crook had found life on the ship much too slow for his taste. He knew nobody aboard, and the passengers would play only with friends. He came to my office on the eve of our arrival at Marseilles.

"Say, purser," said he, "I think I'll get off at Marseilles and catch another ship."

"There's a coincidence," I said. "I was going to put you off there anyway!"

He was astonished, but took the thing quietly enough. Next morning in the bustle of our arrival I forgot all about the man. A steward informed me that a passenger wanted to see me in the smoke-room. I went along. It was the sharper.

"Have a drink," he said.

I have never seen the good of being up-stage or high-hat with such people, so I had the drink. He drew me into a quiet corner, produced his wallet, and from that took out five pound notes.

"Say, look here," he said, holding out the notes. "Tell me how you spotted me and the notes are yours!"

I did not take his money, nor did I tell him what had given him away. He left the ship, I feel certain, with a very exaggerated notion of my power of discernment.

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There are times, fortunately, when the sharpers meet minds too acute for them. On one of the Orient liners once we had as passengers an elderly gentleman and his son, people of celebrated name and outstanding wealth. The father liked to sit in the smoke-room after lunch, dozing over a game of patience, while the son, an international rugby player, preferred deck tennis or the bathing-pool. One night I saw father and son at cards with a couple of men whom I suspected, but against whom I had no real evidence of crookedness.

I sauntered into the smoke-room and did a bit of what the Americans call 'kibitzing'—that is, I began to look on. The game was bridge, but the stakes were high, I discovered, no less than a pound a hundred with five-pound corners. A glance at the score-card informed me that father and son were losing. The young man was trying to make up lost ground by forcing the play.

As I stood there there was a deal of the cards. The young fellow picked up his lot, looked at the hand, and put it down again. Then he leaned across the table.

"I'm not playing any more," he said quietly, "and I want all the cards turned face upward. We are supposed to be playing with the pack my father used for a game of patience this afternoon. His nose bled slightly, and there is a spot of blood on the three of diamonds. If the blood spot is there I'll apologize and pay double what I owe. But if it isn't," he added, with a ring in his voice, "I'm going to give you two fellows the biggest thrashing you ever had in your lives! "

He got to his feet—over six feet of him, with shoulders the width of a door. The cards were turned face up and the three of diamonds exposed. There wasn't a trace of blood on it. The two sharpers streaked for the saloon door. The young fellow roared with laughter.

I asked him what had made him suspicious.

"Look at the hand they dealt me," he said. "You know it, of course—a well-known combination that looks unbeatable, but isn't. There was a chance that the hand might have appeared naturally, but I doubted it and took the risk. And, my word, didn't those chaps give themselves away! "

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Once we carried a couple of American prize-fighters from Australia to England. They were fairly well ahead in their profession, and by the terms of their contracts they sailed first class. On the first day out from Sydney they appeared in the saloon for lunch in their shirt-sleeves rolled to the elbows. The captain came down and saw them. He sent for the second steward.

"Tell those men," he said, "to go and put their coats on. If they won't turn them out of the saloon!"

This was a large order for the second steward. He was a small fellow, and he knew who the offenders were, but he went over to their table.

"Captain's orders, gentlemen," he said mildly. "Will you kindly go and put your coats on?"

"Tell the cap'n," said one of the pugs, "it's too damn' hot!"

The steward knew better than to carry such an answer to the Old Man. He reported, "They say, sir, that they'll dress after lunch."

That, in the common phrase, did it. The captain rose in wrath and strode across the saloon, and he talked to the pugs in a voice that they had never heard even from a fight announcer in those days of no loud-speakers.

"Get out of the saloon at once, you louts!" he roared. "And if you dare to come in here again improperly dressed I'll take care that for the rest of the voyage you eat your meals in the steerage!"

They hesitated, probably contemplating a 'comeback,' but the glare in the Old Man's blue eyes was too much for them. They bolted.

Next day their manager called to see me. He apologized for the 'bad break' his men had been guilty of, and promised they would be on their best behaviour from then on. He told me that one of the fighters had run out of money, and he showed me a letter which said that fifty pounds for the penniless one's benefit would be awaiting the ship at Naples. Would I meantime allow the man to have credit aboard up to ten pounds? The proposition seemed safe enough, and I made the necessary arrangement.

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There was a honeymoon couple on the ship—a young doctor and his wife. They had a thousand pounds to spend on their trip, and, like most Australians, the husband liked making money fly.

A day or two after the call by the fighters' manager I was accosted on deck by a passenger.

"I think, Mr Purser," he said, "you had better look into the smoke-room. There's some heavy gambling going on."

I thanked my informant and acted on his advice at once. At a table in the smoke-room were the three Americans and the young Australian doctor. I brought myself athwart the table.

"Hullo, doc! Having a bit of a gamble? How are things going?"

The young fellow only smiled in rather sickly fashion and went on with the game. It was banker they were playing, but there were sovereigns on the cards. I looked over the young medico's shoulder and saw a record that he was three figures to the bad.

"About time you quitted, doc," I said. "Come and have a cup of tea."

The American manager became a trifle truculent.

"Say, officer," said he, "this game ain't no never-mind of yours. You go and 'tend your own business."

"Let me have those cards you're using," I shot at him.

His face changed colour. He got up and snatched the cards, walked out of the room to the ship's side, and chucked them overboard.

"You can't damn' well have them now," he said, when he came back. "Don't see what you wanted them for, anyhow."

"Ah!" said I. "The crew are always glad to get a pack when the passengers have done with them. Those looked a bit worn."

Then I got the young husband by the arm and led him to my cabin.

"Do you think," he said, "that I'd better tell my wife about this?"

"If you don't," I replied, "some one else will. But don't

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give her any details. What made you let them run you into playing for such big stakes?"

"We started at shillings, but when it came to my turn to take the bank the manager chap put a sovereign on his card. I pointed it out to him, and he said that if I couldn't afford to cover it he'd take it off. But he hated, he said, to move a bet because it busted his luck. He was sorry and so on, and—well, I was a fool. I thought if he could afford it so could I. Once the big money was on there was no stopping them."

"I see. And how did the others get on?"

"Jackson went down ten pounds and the other two won the lot."

"Have you paid them?"

"Not yet," said the young fellow. "I gave them IOU's."

"Well, don't pay them," I said. "Let me see what I can do. Now go and tell your wife before anyone else spills the story to her."

Next day the man called Jackson came along to the ship's office. He wanted twenty-five pounds kept for him in the safe. This was the fellow that I had franked for credit until he reached Naples, and he was the only one of the American trio, according to the doctor, who had lost in the banker game. It was pretty plain that the three had carved the young medico up between them. I took his money, and then I sent for the three together.

"How much money does Dr Chose owe you?" I asked.

"I've got his IOU's for close on three hundred pounds," said the manager fellow.

"Right," I said. "Either you hand the IOU's over to me or I take the three of you before the captain. Which is it to be?"

"Aw, g'wan!" the manager blustered. "You ain't got nothin' on us!"

"I have evidence enough to clap the lot of you in gaol."

He glared at me. I thought he was going to call my bluff. But after a second or two he opened his wallet and handed me the slips of paper.

"Is this the lot?" I demanded.

"Sure."

"Then beat it out of my cabin. And no more trouble from you on this ship."

I sent for the young doctor.

"Close the door," I said, when he arrived.

He did so, and I produced the papers and a box of matches. He watched me burn the IOU's, sighed relievedly, and rang for a drink.

§ iii

When the Bishop of Adelaide, Dr Nutter Brown, sailing with us to England, heard that a fireman had died in the barber's chair he asked leave to talk with the dead man's shipmates. The permission was given, and it is certain that the Right Reverend's talk was edifying. But he had news from the fireman's shipmates which distressed him considerably; the dead man had left a young wife and two children, and he had an old mother who had depended on him entirely. Returning to his cabin, Dr Nutter Brown wrote out a notice of the sad circumstances, saying that he was opening a subscription list among the passengers, and that he would be pleased to act as treasurer. The collection reached the quite gratifying total of a hundred and forty-three pounds, and that amount was deposited with me against our arrival at Tilbury.

It was a Saturday when we arrived. Every one left aboard was up to the ears in work, and it was irritating for me to hear from a quartermaster that a lady was asking from the shore if she could see me. At such a time it was the rule that no visitors were allowed. I swallowed my annoyance, however, and bade the messenger bring the lady along. The visitor was in deep mourning, with a black-edged handkerchief well in evidence.

"Are you the purser?" she asked through tears.

"Yes, madam."

"I'm Mrs Wilkins," she wept. "I've come for the money as was collected for me on account of the sudden death of my pore 'usband."

I explained gently that the money would be handed to her

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as soon as possible, but her credentials would have to be investigated first. She was a good bit upset, but, realizing there was no help for it, she left me. I got down to my work again.

An old lady was shown in. She also was in deep mourning. She was the fireman's mother, and she had come for the money. I sympathized with her on the death of her son, but told her pretty much what I had told the previous visitor.

This second caller had hardly got clear of the wharf when a third mourner arrived. In trembling voice she extolled the virtues of her dead husband, so suddenly taken from her. She agreed that it was only right that her claim should be investigated, but wondered if it would be possible for her to have five pounds on account.

As the morning passed I had visits from four wives and three old mothers, all bowed with sorrow, but all deeply interested in the money. It was easy to see what had happened. News of the amount collected had got round the 'glory-hole,' and several of the scoundrels had written from Naples to tell their friends about it. But the dodging went even deeper. When the case was investigated it was found that the fireman was unmarried, and that his mother had been dead for years. The money collected was handed to the Charity Organization.

Talking of collections, there was one skipper I sailed with who was particularly keen on the church services aboard. In those days the travelling public had more loose cash among them. Standing orders for the second steward were that he was to take the collection plate at service first of all to the captain. The Old Man would undo his frock-coat, carefully take a sovereign from his waistcoat-pocket, and set it religiously in the centre of the tray. The steward would then collect among the passengers.

The service being over, the skipper would put the question, "How much to-day, purser?" And I would tell him the total collected and hand him back the sovereign. The captain was a poor man, but his exhibited sovereign had a way of bumping up the collections and so benefiting various worthy causes. I've never troubled to con the ethics of his dodge. Perhaps

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the skipper's answer, had he been challenged, would have been the same as that of the kirk elder who worked the same trick: "Trumpeters are not required to fight."

Another bishop travelling with us was astonished by the number of men on board who turned up to divine service. He wished, he said, that he could secure such bumper congregations in his own church. I promised that on the day he left the ship I would tell him how it was done. He was a passenger to Egypt, and had to wait for the information until we got to Port Said.

"Now, then," he said, when his luggage was cleared, "I want to hear your secret."

"Promise me first, sir, that you won't take offence."

He gave the promise, not a little mystified.

"Well," I said, "I run a sweepstake on the hymn numbers."

"What on earth," said his Right Reverence, "does that mean?"

I explained. We ran a 'tote' on the unit figures of the total of the hymn numbers added together. The officers were not allowed to join in: they had to attend church service anyway. It really was astonishing to see the number of men who turned up, and their excitement when the announcement of the final hymn number approached was immense. We had no number-board, and it was impossible to get the result of the sweep until a few minutes before the end of the service. By then all our scamps had heard something to the benefit of their souls.

§ iv

Soon after leaving Colombo, one voyage from Australia, the whole ship was put into an uproar. A man and woman came to the ship's office and said they had been robbed of six hundred pounds' worth of jewellery.

They were returning to England for good, went their story. They had sold up their home and had converted the cash into jewels. These the woman had carried in a garter purse about her leg. While having a bath she had put the purse on the bathroom shelf. Having bathed, she had gone back to

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her cabin, only to remember when dressing that she had left the purse behind. She had rushed back to the bathroom, but the purse had gone. The stewardess had been summoned at once and told of the loss, and a search in every nook and cranny of the bathroom had been made. But there was no trace of the purse.

Something in the attitude of the pair riled me. There was, to begin with, no real ground for suspecting the stewardess, but the man wanted me to have a search made through the stewardess's belongings. I refused.

"The stewardess is a thoroughly decent woman," I said, "and an old servant of the company. All the ship's servants are people of good reputation, and it is a slight on their characters to suggest any such proceeding."

The husband asked to be taken to the captain. We went along together to the Old Man's quarters, and the couple retailed their story to him. The woman made no bones at all about accusing the stewardess of the theft. I pointed out that several people had used the bathroom between the time the woman had left it and the discovery of her loss. On this they wanted the captain to examine these people, but he refused. He couldn't, he said, treat his passengers as if they were thieves.

I had a notice put up on the ship's board describing the purse and offering a handsome reward from the owner for its return, but the couple were not satisfied. They insulted their fellow-passengers by hanging a bag in the dining-saloon with a notice attached which said that if the missing jewels were put in the bag no further account of the mystery would be called for. I ordered the bag and notice to be removed, where-upon the woman came to my cabin and accused me of being in league with the bathroom steward, now included among their suspects.

We arrived at Port Said, and the couple went ashore and dispatched a cable to England without informing anyone of what they had done. As a result, two passengers came aboard at Naples, stiffly built chaps in bowler-hats. The first night out of Naples one of these men came to my cabin and spilled

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the beans. He and his companion were detectives, summoned overland by the Port Said cable to investigate the loss of the jewels during the run round to England. I took the men along to the captain. The Old Man was naturally a bit nettled by the high-handed and covert action of the irritating pair, but said he would help the two detectives as well as he could.

We got to Tilbury, but the loss of the jewels was as big a mystery as ever. The police obtained search-warrants and 'registered' the homes of both stewardess and bathroom steward. They drew, as anyone on the ship could have advised them beforehand, a complete blank in both cases.

The ship was in Tilbury Dock. All the passengers had left. I was accosted by the bosun while having a stroll on deck.

"What's all this 'ere to-do, sir," he asked, "about a purse bein' lost?"

I told him.

"When was it missed, sir?"

"Two days out of Colombo."

"Would you mind goin' down to the cabin it was lost from, sir, an' puttin' your arm out of the porthole?"

I went below and did as I was asked. Then I came on deck again.

"That's the cabin I was thinkin' of, sir," said the bosun.

"What was this 'ere purse reckoned to be like?"

I described a garter purse.

"Well, I'll tell you what, sir. I was cleanin' decks that mornin'—just like you said, two days out o' Colombo," said the bosun—"when I sees somethin' slung out o' that very cabin. It was a thing like a snake, sir, with a pouch on it."

"That's the thing!" I exclaimed. "Why the hell didn't you report that before?"

The bosun scratched his head mournfully. He said it had not struck him that the thing he'd seen was a purse.

I dashed ashore and got on to Scotland Yard by 'phone. I asked them to send a man down to the ship at once. I had new information about the jewel robbery. In less than an hour a car drew up alongside and an inspector came up the gangway. The bosun repeated his story, and the inspector recon-

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structed the incident in the same way as I had done. Then he left us.

Subsequent investigation on a new line brought out the fact that the woman had gone ashore at Colombo and sold the stones to a jeweller there for six hundred pounds, and that she had sent the money from Colombo Post-office to New Zealand. She had left that country owing a large amount in gambling debts, of which her husband had no knowledge. The fake loss of the jewels was an expedient for paying them, again without the husband's knowledge, though it heartlessly left the man lamenting the robbery of their savings.

XII

WITH THE MINE-SWEEPERS

I HAD held a commission in the Naval Reserve for many years, and in June 1914 I was doing my annual training with the Navy. I was in H.M.S. *Valiant* off the Island of Arran when orders were received that no reserve officers were to be allowed to leave.

I was due to rejoin my ship for the Australian run at the end of July. Only the fact that I was a sea-serving officer enabled me to get away. But, even so, I had to report daily to Whitehall.

On the afternoon of August 3 I was playing with my brother's children in the garden. A maid came out and said that a naval officer was asking for me. Thinking the caller was one of my shipmates, I told the girl to show him into the garden.

The visitor, however, was a 'jaunty'—as the lower deck calls the Master-at-Arms—and, addressing me formally by name and rank, he informed me that I was to go with him at once to the Admiralty. When we got there I saw the Appointment Officer, who asked me if I had my uniform and gear ready. I said they were, and was told to go and fetch them. I was to report back that same evening at ten-fifty.

This looked very like business, and I hurried down to Tilbury to collect the gear. I didn't bring away my Mercantile Marine uniforms. The shore steward stowed away two large packing-cases of stuff for me in the shed, and there they would remain until I fetched them.

I was back at the Admiralty well before the appointed time. The officer I was reporting to appeared to be very agitated, turning every other minute as though to pick up the telephone, but always refraining with impatient mutterings after looking at the clock. At two minutes to eleven he did pick

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up the 'phone, and he rapped out the words, "House of Commons!"

Eleven P.M. in London is midnight in Berlin. There was an atmosphere of tension in the room, as though it was charged with electricity. I was one of several officers standing by. We sat in silence that was broken only by the ticking of the clock and the occasional scuffle on the floor of a nervous foot. A minute passed. There was no sound from the telephone which with white-knuckled hand the officer was pressing to his ear. Then came a slight *burr-r-r!* and the strained look on the officer's face deepened to seriousness. Into the room floated the sonorous boom of Big Ben striking the hour. It drowned the chirruping of the message coming through the 'phone. The officer hung up the receiver, and his eyes were glittering.

"War!" he said quietly. He got up and came over to me. "War!" he repeated. "*Mauretania*. Good luck!"

And as he shook my hand he almost pushed me from the room.

At a minute past midnight on August 4, 1914, I was speeding by train to Liverpool. I tingled at the thought of joining the ship that was the pride of our Mercantile Marine, the *Mauretania*, which for five years had held the Blue Riband of the Atlantic and was to hold it for another fifteen. But I was in for a disappointment. At Liverpool I heard she had put back into New York. In the drive to reach England quickly on the threat of war trouble had started in her engine-room, and she had had to return for repairs.

When I reported the non-arrival of the *Mauretania* the Senior Naval Officer ordered me to join the *Aquitania*, another Cunarder almost as famous as her sister-ship. That same night, as we were patrolling the Irish Channel, we collided with a freighter. No lives were lost, but our ship damaged her bows so badly that she had to return to dock. That meant more delay.

In the autumn of 1914 Liverpool was the scene of great activity. Merchant ships in number were being taken over by the Admiralty and fitted out to form a valuable arm of

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the Service, the armed merchant cruisers. Naval officers were sent to take over those ships, and others of higher rank occupied suites in the fine offices of the Cunard and other shipping companies to carry on as S.N.O.'s and transport officers. In the beginning the differing views of system and routine between one branch of the sea services and the other made for friction. Merchant sailors who had run their ships efficiently under peace conditions found difficulty in running them, or saw no need for running them, as it were, by numbers. As time went on, however, the spirit of give-and-take prevailed more and more, and matters went smoothly. There was fun to be had even over the points of friction. One naval 'four-ringer' I remember was so 'taken up' with the telephone that he gave orders that he was to be the only one to handle it, and answered every call personally. By doing so he played nicely into the hands of junior officers. They welcomed the chance of calling him up, telling him exactly what they thought of him, and ringing off. It 'larned him' beautifully.

With the *Aquitania* in dock I hung around for three days waiting for a fresh appointment. Then I received a wire from the Admiralty appointing me to the *Laconia*, lying at Devonport. Another Cunarder, I thought.

When I arrived at the gates of the dockyard I asked the 'jaunty' on duty where I would find the *Laconia*. He ran his finger down the register. "Number Three basin, sir," he said.

"Number Three? Impossible!" said I. I knew the Cunarder and I knew the basin. A ship of the *Laconia's* tonnage would never fit into it.

"That's where she's lying, sir," the jaunty said positively.

I went off to investigate, and discovered that by the alteration of a letter in the wire I had been given the name of a Cunarder instead of the cargo-boat to which I was actually appointed. It was the *Lakonia*, a five-thousand-ton ship of the Donaldson Line, that lay snugly in Number Three basin.

The man in command of my new ship was an old Scotsman, a really first-class sailor. He was, however, rather nervous of the job which had been given him. This was to convey a

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cargo of mines to a 'destination unknown.' The mines were in process of being loaded into the after-hold, and they looked most formidably vicious.

"I dinna ken anything aboot thae big things," said the skipper, plucking at his underlip. "Do you?"

I was like the rest of my shipmates: I had never seen a mine before. I thought it might be as well if one of us got some tips about them, so I went ashore to seek information. We were not sailing until six o'clock, and I had time to make a tour of the dockyard offices—fortunately, perhaps, for I found nobody who could or would spare me a minute until about the last hour. Then I came on an officer who was less busy. He told me that the mines we were shipping were of an old pattern, practically obsolete, and were only meant to serve until supplies of the latest type were available. They were 'balance' mines, depending on being canted out of the perpendicular to explode.

"To what angle must they be tilted to explode?" I asked.

"Oh," was the casual answer, "somewhere between thirty-five and fifty degrees."

At tea that evening I asked the skipper if the *Lakonia* was a good sea boat.

"Yes," he said; "but she rolls like a stick when she gets a swing on."

"Does she ever touch thirty-five degrees?"

The skipper thought for a moment or two, then admitted that the ship might cant that much. I ordered the steward out of the cabin and told the Old Man what I had learned. His expression became thoughtful indeed.

There was a little mirror at the end of the saloon. On this, by the aid of a protractor and a piece of French chalk, I marked off the fatal angles. Then I depended a small soda-water bottle from a nail in the top of the mirror frame.

"When the bottle swings to the chalk-mark," I said, "we shall have to take the high jump."

We had not been many hours at sea when we ran into foul weather. The ship rolled horribly. We watched that soda-water bottle swing drunkenly from side to side, expecting

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every moment to be blown to kingdom come. When at last we transferred our cargo to one of the naval ships we were told that our boat might have turned turtle as far as harm from the mines was concerned. They were without their fuses.

§ii

A week or so after the apprehensions of the *Lakonia* voyage I was sent by the Admiralty to a delightful spot on the Scottish coast. I was attached to the mine-sweeping trawlers, manned by as fine a lot of shipmates as I've ever had the luck to be with. They knew little about service routine, but mine-sweeping came naturally to them. The 'gallows' on their little vessels, normally in use with the trawls, were easily adaptable for the 'sweep' wire, and the otter-boards that kept the net-mouth open in fishing served admirably for controlling the depth at which the sweep wire worked.

Senior naval officers were in charge of these units, and in those early days there were times when the merchant seamen found themselves somewhat irked by the stern discipline of naval routine that was so foreign to their free-and-easy ways. This condition sometimes caused trouble not unmingled with comedy.

Two trawlers came in one Sunday in weather that was pretty foul to say the least of it. Scarcely had they dropped their 'hooks' when orders were received by their skippers bidding them make out to sea again at once in search of an enemy submarine said to be lying in shallow water just outside. The trawler men flatly refused to obey. They wanted to explain their refusal, but the naval officer in charge would have none of it.

A message came ashore for me to report to him at once. I hurried off to his ship and was apprised of the situation with little delay. But I knew enough about the trawler men to realize that they would not act in this way unless they had a genuine grievance, and I offered to find out what the trouble was. I was brusquely told to remember that the country was at war. The trawler men had refused duty, and death, in his

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view, was the only suitable penalty for such conduct. Already a firing-squad had been ordered into the picket-boat, and he was quite prepared to take the trawler skippers ashore and shoot them out of hand, should it be necessary, rather than bandy words with men who had so obviously forgotten their duty.

"Before you do anything so drastic, sir," I pleaded, "may I be permitted to see these men?"

For five minutes or more I begged to be given a chance to investigate the case, and it was with a great sigh of relief that at last I won a grudging consent, and went over to the little ships.

They had been dispatched from another naval base with a very meagre supply of food, and the men had received no advance of pay. But the main cause of the trouble was that they had not yet had the opportunity of signing the necessary forms that would entitle their wives and dependants to draw their allowances. The men agreed that they were wrong in refusing duty, but they pointed out in defence of their attitude that if anything happened to them there was nothing to guarantee that their families would not be left starving and penniless.

I went back to make my report and put the case for the men to the test. The justice of their plea was admitted, but it was maintained that refusal of duty was a capital offence in any circumstances. I was told, nevertheless, to procure a Navy Bill for a hundred pounds and bring it along for signature. This I was to take ashore and cash for the purpose of advancing the men the pay to which they were entitled. I was to victual their craft and get the forms they needed filled in and properly signed.

The second part of the programme was easy. But I expressed my doubt of being able to get a hundred pounds after six o'clock on a Sunday evening in Scotland.

"This country is at war, man!" snapped the officer. "Find the bank manager. Tell him from *me* that he's got to give you the money."

Off I went to the bank—a private house in those days—and

took a yank at the doorbell. A maid appeared, and I asked if I could see the manager.

"No. Where would he be but at the kirk?" she said, and shut the door in my face.

I went to the kirk. As I entered one of the ushers—what they call a 'deacon,' I suppose—caught sight of me and came forward dry-washing his hands and smiling.

"Is the bank manager here?" I whispered.

The deacon (he may have been, after all, the beadle) asked me if there was anything wrong.

"No," I said, "but I want to speak to him urgently. Will you call him out?"

The functionary (he may have been an elder) crept along the aisle until he came to the second or third pew from the front. He whispered to a man sitting by the pew-end who turned to gaze at me with an expression that plainly showed his distaste at being so rudely interrupted in the middle of his devotions. After taking good stock of my uniform he knelt in prayer for several minutes. Then he came along to me, and we stepped outside.

When I told him what I was after the manager looked like having a seizure. Did I not know it was the Sabbath? Was he not engaged in devotion? More important than either of these points, was I not aware that banking transactions on that day and at that hour were illegal, requiring special legislation to permit of their being carried out?

There was every chance, I thought, if I didn't get the money that my irate chief would have me shot along with the trawler skippers. I came over all Secret Service and mystery, laying importance on with a trowel.

"Sir," I said, "it is an order—not mine—but of the officer in charge himself. We're at war. And if I don't get this money immediately two men—perhaps three—will be shot for it!"

The guid man went back into the kirk and knelt once more in prayer. When he came out again he carried his 'lum' hat. He took me by the arm and led me from the kirk across the green to the bank. In ten minutes I had the money, and in

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another fifty the two trawlers were scouting for enemy submarines along the coast.

Some naval officers, especially those who had so gallantly responded to their country's call and joined up after retirement, failed to realize that they now had to deal with men who had not been taught by years of service and discipline to do things in just-so style and at a nod. They failed to appreciate, I think, the splendid qualities of the trawler men, whose blind devotion to duty sent them out to sea in all weathers, handling their little craft with matchless skill in the teeth of dangers, and who, I know quite well, were indifferent to the terrible risks they ran. It was grand sea-going material, and it grieved me very much to see that at times it was so woefully misused.

Without doubt these naval officers showed a courage and resourcefulness during this dreadful period that calls for nothing but praise, but it took many months for some of them to recognize that in the great brotherhood of the sea the men of the merchant service stood shoulder to shoulder with their brothers of the Senior Service.

This lack of understanding resulted in many incidents which, while serious at the time, were saved from becoming in any sense 'dangerous' by the humour of the situation. I have in mind one such case that serves as a good illustration.

One officer, a small man and a bit of a martinet, was by no means popular with the ratings. His ship was running for port and searching for submarines at the same time. Now the ship was a converted yacht—a thing of beauty with clipper's bows and thin tapering masts. Visibility from her upper structure, by reason of the rough sea, was not too good. There might be an enemy submarine about, but if it lay any distance off there would be no spotting it. A higher look-out was wanted than the yacht's bridge could offer.

"Have a bosun's-chair run up on the fore-mast," ordered the officer.

"Very good, sir," said the bosun to the junior officer conveying the order, and one may suppose that, consistent with

politeness to his superior, he conveyed the query, "And then what?"

The query had reason. The yacht's fore-mast was a thin bit of a stick, a piece of trimming, so to speak, with no more use in it than to carry a signal halyard. All right to rig a bosun's-chair on it, but if the chair carried anyone of weight aloft something would part. In such a sea the whole thing might even buckle like a matchstick.

The tackle for the chair was rigged, however, and then the question arose as to who was going aloft in it.

"Send the bosun up," came the order. "He rigged it, didn't he?"

When this was conveyed to the bosun (it should be remembered that the vessel was a very small one, carrying a tiny crew) the bosun said in effect, "Not me!" He weighed somewhere about seventeen stone, and he had a mercantile marine training.

"What's all this?" demanded the officer when the bosun was brought to task.

"With due respect, sir, a man of my weight can't go aloft on that slender bit of a mast. It just won't stand the strain, sir; and in a sea like this there'd be no chance of swimmin' for it. It'd be just asking for trouble, sir."

"Don't bandy words with me, my man! Get aloft at once!"

"Begging your pardon, sir, no thankee, sir—not with my weight!"

Tenseness reigned on the foredeck for a long moment, crossed killicks and gold braid looking each other sternly in the eye.

It was the officer who gave way.

"My man," he said, "you're nothing but a bloody coward, and I'm the fellow to shame you. I'll go up in the chair myself!"

So, indeed, he did. The yacht bucketed her toilsome way to port and the officer remained slung to her circle-describing fore-mast for a long time before it was understood that he wanted to get back on deck. The crews of the trawlers and

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drifters lying at anchor in harbour had, in fact, every chance to enjoy the spectacle ere the chair was lowered.

§ iii

The British public took the mine-sweepers to their hearts, particularly in the early days of the War. We were so inundated with gifts that the Naval Store Officer got fed up with handling the stuff.

As Christmas drew near the spate of gifts increased. Balaclava helmets, socks, cardigans, pullovers, scarves, and a myriad variety of woollen goods poured in on us. It was something of a welcome change when we heard from the station-master that a large barrel of walnuts, addressed to "the officer i/c mine-sweepers," was lying in the goods yard. It was not too securely packed, he said, and it ought to be removed at once, for he could not be responsible for the contents. I took two hands with me and went off to claim the walnuts. They were in a very large barrel indeed, but with only a piece of sacking tied insecurely over its end to keep off pilferers.

The mine-sweepers had, as yet, no store of their own, and the question was where the nuts might be stowed until Sunday, when units of the fleet would be in to water and coal. As I was pondering the question I saw the Town Clerk go past. I hailed him and told him of our difficulty. He pondered for quite a minute or two, then he said, "Weel, there's a brick shed at the back o' the Town Hall. Ye might use that."

The two hands trundled the barrel to the Town Hall, and I went with the Town Clerk to get the key. The shed was an ideal place, clean and dry.

On Sunday morning I passed the word to all available trawlers to send men at ten to the Town Hall to collect the nuts. I waited until all parties were gathered before I unlocked the shed door. Followed by the men, I stepped inside. The barrel of nuts was there, but lying on the top was an odd-looking roll of canvas.

"Tip that dirty canvas off the barrel," I ordered.

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Two men went forward, but as they started to lift it the thing seemed to slip from their hands, and it began to unroll itself. We watched it, fascinated, as it unpeeled down the side of the barrel. The last turn flopped on the cement floor, and out tumbled a dead Chinaman!

I sent a man at the double to bring the Town Clerk.

"What's the idea of putting a corpse on top of our walnuts?" I asked that worthy.

"He came off that oil-tanker that arrived yesterday."

"Yes; but what's he doing here?"

"Weel, ye see," said he, "when I let you have it for your walnuts I didn't expect a corp' during the week-end. This is the toon mortuary."

"What did he die of?" I asked.

The Town Clerk scratched his head. "Something, I think, that they called *beri-beri*."

"My God!" said I. "Is *beri-beri* carried by walnuts?"

The Town Clerk was sure he couldn't say. Then up spoke one of our old skippers.

"Wha wad want tae eat the shells?" said he. "As long's we dinna crack them wi' oor teeth we shouldna catch aught."

Apparently the simple precaution was enough, for nobody did "catch aught."

§iv

After we had been sweeping for three months a letter came to me from the Admiralty expressing great appreciation of the work the men were doing. Admiral Doveton Sturdee was coming to the port on the following Wednesday to convey the thanks of their lordships by word of mouth. I was to arrange for some of the skippers to be ashore to meet him.

Only three of the skippers were on hand, and there was no chance of collecting others. But with those I had I arranged that they were to be at the Town Hall at three o'clock. I explained to them just whom they were going to meet, and told them to spruce themselves up in their No. 1 suitings.

On Wednesday afternoon I stood on the Town Hall steps waiting for the heroes. The Admiral was already inside, with

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the officer in charge. The skippers came into view at the far end of the High Street. Even in the distance they gave every indication of having put on a good deal of extra polish. Nearer at hand, however, the details of their furbishings were something of a shock. Each wore a brightly coloured tie. (There was a red one which positively sang.) Two wore button-holes of flowers, and the third flourished a sprig of heather in his cap. They were marvellous. I loved them. I hadn't the heart to admonish them for their variations from uniform attire, and criticism would have made them very ill at ease. The Admiral, I decided, would have to take them as they were. I ushered them in.

At the sight of my three gallants Admiral Sturdee had to shake himself out of what the Scots call a 'dwam.' But he was too great a man to allow himself to be more than momentarily incredulous, and he was grasping the hands of the men in turn before they could gather anything of his first reaction. Then he cleared his throat and told them the object of the meeting. And Sturdee could express himself well. He told them of the Admiralty's appreciation of their splendid work. The skippers listened in silence, quite without embarrassment. Probably most of what the Admiral said went over their heads, but they grasped his meaning all right. The skipper with the sprig of heather had primed himself for the occasion. His smile grew wider and wider as the speech developed, and one could see that he was gathering himself to herald the climax. The Admiral reached the end of his peroration (I think he had expected a larger audience): "On behalf of their lordships, on behalf of your country, on behalf of your King, I thank you!" It unleashed 'Heather Jock.' Up he sprang to his feet, waved his sprigged cap wildly, and bellowed "Hooray! Hooray!" with all the force of his magnificent lungs. The other two added their stentorian efforts to his. Then Admiral Sir Frederick C. Doveton Sturdee, K.C.B., C.V.O., C.M.G., straight-faced, gravely shook hands all round once again, and I ushered them from the room.

For many of us the first Christmas of the War is unforgettable, and the mine-sweepers had every reason to register

it in their memories. Orders had been passed along that every possible craft was to be out and on duty, for there was an idea abroad that the enemy meant to make a grand attack that day, hoping to find us off guard. People had not forgotten the trawlers, as I've said, and the spate of gifts swelled each day of the approach to Christmas. A well-known peer advised us that he was sending a turkey for each ship in the mine-sweeping flotilla, and a London daily paper weighed in with the plum-puddings.

In the trawlers and drifters we were allowed to 'rate' one of the deck-hands as cook at threepence extra per day. In my particular ship at the time Donald was the only applicant for the job, and, not having any competitors, he was appointed.

When Donald saw our turkey he almost wept. It was not only bigger than the oven, but bigger even than the stove of which the oven was only a small part. He came to me for instructions for dealing with the monster bird. All I could think of telling him was to cut it in slices and fry it. We weren't going to be done out of our Christmas dinner.

In those early days there was no special accommodation for officers in the trawlers. We sat in a small cabin aft, triangular in shape, and with bunks running along the sides. If the sea was very choppy we had to be battened down, and such was the position on Christmas Day as we waited for dinner. The savoury odours of frying wafted strongly to our noses, harbingers of the entry of Donald with the frying-pan in one hand and a saucepan of boiled 'murphies' in the other. We helped ourselves liberally and fell to. And greedily, for the turkey was not at all bad, we looked forward to the second course.

There were explicit instructions on the label of the pudding tin. The pudding was already cooked, they said, and for serving it hot the best way was to place the tin in water, which should then be brought to the boil. But before this treatment the top of the tin should be pierced.

As we sat with our empty turkey plates, waiting for the second course, the sound of a terrific explosion in the galley

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forward brought us out of our seats. We rushed to the galley, to find a piebald human dancing about, clutching at face and head, swearing and howling with pain. It was Donald, plastered with scalding plum-pudding. He had neglected to pierce the tin. What pudding was not clinging to Donald be-plastered the deck-head. I did then, I think, as resourceful a thing as I ever did in my life. I didn't see why accident should cheat us of our sweet, so avidly awaited. I told the others to fetch their plates, and by dint of scraping the deck-head—and Donald—I quickly filled all platters with plum-pudding, still steaming hot. Let me record that it tasted fine, with very little trace of flavouring from the deck-head—or from Donald.

Of the ships of the Grand Fleet we saw little. Invergordon was still little more than a village, and the occasional big ship it had sight of came in only to give leave or to pick up mails. I had a narrow escape from being on board H.M.S. *Natal* that disastrous New Year's Eve when she blew up. I wanted very much to attend the children's party that was being given aboard, and had an invitation, but I could not accept.

One day when passing this ship we had a signalled inquiry from her whether we had any fish. It happened that the trawl had been down, and that we'd had a fine catch. We sent over a big basket of live fish, turbot, soles, Dublin prawns, and lobsters, and by way of exchange *Natal's* paymaster gave us a case of tobacco-leaf. This was a boon. Tobacco was scarce then. Congestion on the railway had come to a serious pitch, and stores were being held up all along the line.

I had a signal sent out to all trawlers that there would be an issue of tobacco on their arrival in harbour, and that all wishing to draw their allowance should do so. I roped in Jim, the naval rating, and told him to get the case open and generally prepare for the issue. I suggested that he should borrow scales from the grocer.

"Scales, sir?" said Jim, pop-eyed. "Scales, did you say, sir?"

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"That's what I said. How are we going to whack out a pound to each man without them?"

"Sir," he said, "I ain't been in the Navy all me life without learnin' to fist a pahnd o' baccy. I knows the heft of a pahnd within 'arf an ounce without any scales."

He picked up a handful of leaf and, using his elbow as a fulcrum, swung his hand slowly up and down. Then he picked off a leaf or two and threw it back into the case. On this method he dealt with the issue. He seemed, indeed, to have a reasonable idea of quantity, for there was no man in the hundred supplied that objected to his share. But when the hundred pounds of tobacco had been issued from the hundred-pound case there was still a good amount of leaf on the bottom slats. I pointed this out to Jim, who shut one eye.

"Write it off, sir," he advised, "as ullage."

§ v

In that first winter of the War the men went through real hardships. Their sufferings in the course of their long spells of duty were exacerbated by hitches of all kinds in the hastily conceived methods of dealing with supplies, accommodation, and all things material to their comfort. It was only fair that when the men got shore leave they should have pleasure and relaxation. But many of the ships got into harbour during the week-end, which meant that portions of their crews had to take their shore leave on Sunday, a day when, in Scotland, it is impossible to get a drink save illicitly. Through this embargo there came into being 'mouchers,' who hung around the port carrying bottles of fake whisky. They would put themselves in the way of our men, tempt them into their houses for a drink, and sell them bottles of the poisonous filth at exorbitant prices. In one week alone two men were found dead of alcoholic poisoning.

It seemed to me that unless sensible measures were taken for scotching this plague of shebeeners a situation of some peril would be created. I went to Admiral Pears at Cromarty

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and proposed a canteen for the men which would be also open on Sunday. He asked me to go into details and to submit a report. I approached a good firm of brewers in Edinburgh and asked them what they could make of the idea. They weighed in efficiently and helpfully, and the scheme which I was presently able to put forward was adopted by the Admiralty.

A few days after sanction was given Admiral Sturdee and Colonel Grant of the Camerons opened the canteen. It was for the use of men in both services, to sell good drink to them cheaply, even at the risk of breaking the Sabbath. The hall was packed to capacity with Tommies and bluejackets. Admiral Sturdee and Colonel Grant stood in front of the draped counter. The Admiral, a staunch teetotaler, exercised his considerable eloquence on the men, and Colonel Grant made the speech of a soldier and a man. Then I raised my hand as a signal. The flags behind the two speakers rolled slowly back, revealing barrels and barrels of beer!

At this enthralling spectacle the men were for a minute held mute. Then, loud as the sound of a thousand guns (more or less), broke their answer to that delectable revelation. They cheered as though they wanted the biggest thirst procurable for slaking. The Admiral took a cup of tea and Colonel Grant and I drank a pint of ale apiece to the success of the new institution.

The time came when I had to leave Invergordon and the mine-sweeping flotilla. Six months' service with that branch was considered to be as much as an officer could endure. The paymaster of the armed merchant cruiser H.M.S. *Otranto*, when that ship came back to England for refitting after taking part in the Coronel and Falkland engagements, sought to be relieved. The Orient Line asked that I might be appointed in his place, and the Admiralty agreed.

If I have succeeded in conveying even a small part of the liking I had for the men with whom my work in Cromarty brought me into contact it will be conceived with what sadness I found myself telling them I had to leave. I say it with sentiment, but I hope without sentimentality, that those men

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of the drifters and trawlers had established themselves in my heart. Whatever trouble any one of them might have he brought it to me and told me of it with a simplicity and faith which made me, as it would have with any man, search for the utmost I could do to help. I am glad to remember, their troubles being so simple, that I was able in most cases to be of use.

On the eve of my departure, when it was settled that I was leaving by the five o'clock train next day, the men came and asked me to be in the canteen early in the afternoon to say good-bye all round. I turned up about a couple of hours before train time and found a good number of the men there, all got up in their No. 1 suits.

They all rose to their feet as I came in. The senior skipper among them stood forward and, speaking for all hands, said how sorry they were that I was going. Then, sheepishly almost, as if to make little of it, but yet feeling proud all the same, he produced a brown-paper parcel and pushed it across the table to me. I opened it, and inside was a silver cigarette-case, a gold wrist-watch, and a dressing-case.

I knew that it was against regulations for officers to accept gifts from the men, but to have refused would have been like slapping those fellows across the face. Worse than that, for what did they know of regulations? I forgot the then be-blastable things and hailed the club steward.

"Pints all round, please! "

They all drank my health. Then I repeated the order and drank theirs. After a hob-nob with each of them I had 'one for the road,' and they escorted me in a body to the station. When the train steamed out they put up a rousing cheer. It was through misty eyes and with a tightness in my throat that I saw the last of them.

That afternoon remains one of the high spots in my life. The whole thing, probably all too inadequately recorded here, got me right under the fifth rib. Which may be the reason for the bloomer with which I signalized my departure from the canteen, and which did not dawn on me until several weeks later in my cabin on *Otranto* somewhere in mid-

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Atlantic. I was telling a brother-officer of the farewell party, and astonished him by springing to my feet right in the middle of the yarn. Recollection had come to me. In the emotion of parting I had gone off without paying for a single drink!

I worked out the approximate cost of the rounds, added something extra, and sent a cheque to the steward of the canteen, telling him that as long as the change held out he was to put up a pint for any of the mine-sweeping men who came in.

I have said that I reached a high spot in my life when those men showed their regard for me. I might have said that the whole of the time I spent with them was a high spot. It was a great privilege to have worked with men who went about such arduous duties with such selflessness. Little knowledge had they of mines and less of submarines, but they went out with as quiet a deliberation, as simple a demeanour, in danger to clear the seas of danger as if they had been sailing to 'shoot the trawl' for the winning of their hard-won daily bread.

XIII

ARMED MERCHANTMEN

I JOINED H.M.S. *Otranto* at Liverpool. The bright ship that I had known in peace-time was a drab one now, both externally and internally. The gleaming paint of her mail-running had given place to the dull Atlantic grey of war. All her interior decorations had been ripped out, every unessential piece of woodwork cut away, and no superfluous deck-house was left standing on her. She was a ship brought to her bare bones.

Men were swarming over her night and day to get her refitted for sea again. Their main task was to replace with guns of heavier calibre the poor 4.7's that had given her no real chance of acting other than as a target in the action off Coronel on November 1, 1914.

There is a little-known but intensely interesting fact concerning this action at Coronel which I might mention here.

Admiral Craddock prided himself on the fine table he kept. Now when the ship had been in Coronel his steward had gone ashore to obtain some fresh fruit. In the hurry of getting back aboard the man left the fruit on the pier-head. Arriving on board, he was dismayed at his carelessness, but, realizing that the collier which had been left in harbour had a rendezvous with the *Good Hope* the next day, he saw a way of rectifying his error. He approached the wireless operator on the flagship, explained his difficulty, and asked "Sparks" to send a signal to the collier instructing them to bring out the forgotten fruit.

The wireless man pointed out that this was impossible, as the collier had no code-books and would be unable to decipher the message. Our steward, scenting a fiasco and a mother of a row if the fruit was not forthcoming, coaxed the operator to

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send the message in plain English. I myself have seen a copy of this instruction in the official log.

Two hundred miles to the nor'rard the German China Squadron was making for Valparaiso. No doubt the officers and men were looking forward to spending a few happy hours with their compatriots at that port. You can imagine the excitement of the wireless operator on the *Scharnhorst* at picking up this message, and the immediate activity in the fleet.

The rest of the tragic story is history, but it may be that the transmission of that fatuous message meant the loss of two ships and over twelve hundred British seamen.

The *Otranto*, though she was of the squadron collected at the Falklands to deal with Von Spee, had little part in the actual action, which took place on December 8. This was accidental. When the British squadron steamed out of Port Stanley to engage the enemy who, as it seemed, had so unwarily contemplated annexation of this British possession it was seen that, beyond the known composition of the German fighting squadron, there were three ships, probably enemy transports or colliers, standing off Port Pleasant. The *Otranto*, under leadership of H.M.S. *Bristol* and with the *Macedonia*, was detached from the squadron to round up those ships. One of them escaped, but two—which turned out to be colliers—were sunk after removal of their crews. By the time this side-show was over the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* were going the same way as they had sent *Good Hope* and *Monmouth* at Coronel, while over the horizon in running fights *Kent* was hammering *Nürnberg*, to sink her ultimately, while *Cornwall* and *Glasgow* were dealing with *Leipzig*. The *Dresden* escaped.

But here, as at Coronel, the *Otranto* had not the armament to have tackled the least of the German ships. It was necessary even in the matter of the colliers—which might have been armed transports—for her and *Macedonia* to have *Bristol* with them. In view of the *Dresden's* escape and subsequent attempted maraudings this was rather a pity, for the *Bristol* was not only heavier armed than the German light cruiser,

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but had the heels of her by a knot or more. If *Bristol* had been in the general engagement the destruction of the German China Squadron might have been complete.

It was to have her comparatively ineffective 4.7's replaced by 6-inch guns that the *Otranto* had docked at Liverpool.

The refitting was relatively plain sailing. But, though it was almost complete and the ship expected sailing orders daily, the greatest difficulty was being experienced in getting together a crew. There were rumours in the port, many of them well confirmed by survivors, of the number of ships that had been sunk by German raiders, and men were very reluctant to sign on. In the armed merchant cruisers then the greater proportion of the crews were mercantile marine men. They signed on in the ship's articles before a shipping-master, just as in peace-time. And, just as in peace-time, at the end of a voyage they were signed off, drew their pay, and it was optional whether they signed on for the next voyage or not. It was a system that worked all right in time of peace, but, with the War in being, once men had signed off it was almost impossible to get them to come back to a ship. Many of them declared that they would sooner go to the trenches than go to sea. There was some chance of escape, they said, on dry land, but in a torpedoed ship there was as much chance as a trapped rat had in the water-bucket.

Day after day the engineer and myself would haunt the shipping office trying to persuade men to sign on. But they 'weren't having any.' The engineer-commander told the captain that his department was short of thirty-five men, and that he was not prepared to put to sea unless the full complement was made up.

My pre-War seagoing experience now stood me in good stead. I knew something about getting crews, especially in Liverpool. The worry that I could see the captain getting into made me put forward a proposal to him.

"If you will allow me perfect freedom of action, sir," I told him, "I'll get the complement for the engine-room department."

"What do you propose doing?" he asked.

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"There's a runner ashore who knows all the boarding-house-keepers. He may be able to find some men."

The Old Man sighed. "Oh, for the days of the press-gangs!"

"Well, I shan't go as far as that," I said, "but I *may* do a spot of shanghaing."

I told him what I intended trying, and what I needed—a tug, and a taxi for the evening. He gave me permission, and I immediately wired the runner, Smith, and got dressed for action. I put on a discarded suit of my steward's, stuck a 'gorblimey' cap on my head, and tied a sweat-rag about my neck. I looked like a fireman or trimmer. Then I went ashore and got a taxi. In this I stowed a mysterious case, then told the driver to take me to within a hundred yards of the Eight Bells, the exact location of which had perhaps better not be mentioned. It was one of those rank-smelling pubs of which so many may be found in the poor streets of Dockland.

Leaving the taxi well out of sight, I pushed open the door of the 'four-ale' bar. I spotted my man sitting in a corner. He also was dressed for action. A pint was brought at my order, and I stood at the bar counter attending to it what time I quietly weighed up the loungers already congregated. There were some who would be useful.

Making a pretence of feeling tired, I strolled across and sat down beside Smith. Save for a faint quiver of his left eyelid, he took no notice of me. I asked him to have a drink, and we began a conversation for the benefit of the men in the bar. To his natural question of where I was working I replied that I had just had a good pay-off from a merchant ship, and was out to blow a good bit of a wad. At this the scroungers pricked up their ears as they were meant to, and with a slightly tight wave of a fistful of notes in their direction I bade the barman put up drinks all round. Smith, not to be outdone, put up another round presently. And between us we got the men's tongues going. They were skulkers off another armed merchant cruiser. That was what I wanted to know.

I took care not to be in a hurry, but at last got to my feet, yawning.

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"I'm goin' to 'ave a doss," I said. "Gimme a coupla bottles o' rum!" And with a bottle tucked under each arm I tottered to the door, knowing very well that I'd be followed.

I made for Paddy Doyle's boarding-house, put down my fourpence for a night's lodging, and stumbled into the dirty, ill-lit dormitory. A few of the beds were occupied, but on others men were seated playing cards and talking. Smith was not far behind me, nor were some of the men from the Eight Bells. I pulled a wooden bench into the light of the one gas-flare and made a great show of uncorking one of the bottles of rum, at the same time calling loudly for a mug. There was no lack of mugs, and presently men began to stir from their beds to join the party. The mugs were made of enamelled tin, a fact that disguised the amount of rum that went into them. Smith and I took care that the amount in our pannikins remained almost untouched. We had no intention of losing our heads. But we plied the others—in particular, those that we thought best suited our requirements.

I was celebrating a run of luck. Not only had I been paid off with a big wad, which I exhibited proudly, but I'd picked up a soft job as well, helping to take a ship across to Belfast for refitting. No signing on; just a run across, an eight-hour job, with thirty bob at the end and my fare back. Money for jam!

Some of the blighters began smelling the bait; then one fellow asked me outright what chance there was of his having a look in. Then was the time for careful acting. I pondered the idea drunkenly, shaking my head as if I thought the idea wouldn't work.

"'S a marrer of fact," I belched, "storekeeper's leavin' the landin'-stage at twelve. Bein' if there's a coupler so o' ye'd like thirty bob, I believe I c'd sneak 'em aboard. Mebbe three or four."

Some of them were suspicious, but three thought they'd come along. On the pretence of looking for somebody I went out and got a fresh supply of rum from the case in the taxi and told the driver to bring his bus a bit nearer to the boarding-house. A little later I had five drunks in the taxi on their way to the landing-stage to be dumped into the tug. It was

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hard going, but there was plenty of rum in the case, and it lasted easily until I had thirty-three men collected in the tug. Some of them were horribly drunk, and there were one or two clean laid out, for Jock, the tug deck-hand, who was 'in the know,' had taken instructions very literally in handling those that became obstreperous. We pushed off.

Chug-chug-chug! went the screw of the tug, and in very little time the great bulk of the ship loomed dark above us. Just as we drew up to the gangway one of the men, something less drunk than the rest, looked up and caught sight of her guns.

"Christ!" he yelled, in his shrill Cockney voice. "She's a bloody——"

He got no farther. Jock had a punch in either fist like a mule's kick, and the Cockney was hoisted inboard, with the passed-out drunks, in a cargo sling.

Not long after midnight *Otranto* moved silently past the tall tower at New Brighton. She was sailing under sealed orders, destination unknown. Except for two men short in the engine-room, her complement was full. She did not return to England for nearly three years.

§ ii

Next morning I sent for the bosun and told him to muster the new men at the ship's office.

They looked a sorry lot in the bright morning sunshine. Some of them obviously had the 'hang-over' feeling in its most acute form. I read them the articles.

"This ship ain't bound for Belfast," said one of the men loudly, after a look about him. "She's on a southerly course."

I don't think any of them recognized me as their companion of the previous night. I looked the man straight in the face.

"What made you think, then," I asked blandly, "that the ship was going to Belfast?"

He looked rather foolish, and grumbled that he had heard Belfast was her destination. When I explained that we were

under sealed orders, and that not even the captain knew where we were bound, though he would know by midnight, the man flew into a rage. He was a true-to-type sea-lawyer, and he persuaded three others to refuse with him to sign on the articles. All the other men signed and soon settled down quite comfortably, but I had a lot of trouble with this truculent wharf-rat.

He signed by and by; but a good time later, when we were off the coast of Peru, he and three others stole the whaler one night, provisioned and watered her, and set off for the land. We did not miss the boat until daybreak, and then found her only after several days. Meantime the deserters had landed and begun a trek of fifty miles across barren, sandy dunes in the heat of a tropic sun.

They were captured by natives and nearly murdered. Weeks later we called at the port of Payta and learned that they were in prison there, waiting until some arrangement could be come to with the British Consul at Lima for their disposal. We claimed the men and took them back on board. When they had been given time to recover they were brought before a court-martial and charged with desertion in war-time and stealing Government property.

At the court-martial I had the *rôle* of acting deputy judge-advocate. The ringleader listened to the charges with a smile of cunning contempt on his face. When asked if he had anything to say in his defence he said that the court had no jurisdiction over him or his associates, because they had all signed articles under assumed names. He demanded to be brought before a British Consul. This meant that the ship would be held up in her activities, and that the country would be put to no little expense. I suggested to the court that since he had signed articles under the name of White he could be tried under that name, as his companions could be tried under their assumed names, and that all four could, if found guilty, be punished under the names in which they had signed articles. The court adopted the suggestion, and all four were found guilty on both counts.

XIV

SOUTHWARD HO!

As we sailed down the Irish Sea and into the Channel we were kept at battle stations, or 'general quarters,' properly speaking. The 'blockade' declared by Germany was in full operation. Hourly we were picking up messages of warning or telling of disaster. "Steamer torpedoed off Scilly Isles," they ran. "Submarine sighted off Mersey mouth." "Merchant vessel attacked." Only those who experienced the 'strafe' know how slow our authorities were not only in recognizing the reality of the menace, but in evolving means for dealing with it, and how near we came as a nation to being deprived of supplies.

Not knowing when a submarine might pop up on any quarter and let off a 'fish' at us was nerve-racking to our inexperience, for we were then inclined to over-estimate the powers of surprise in that craft. We were always glad when night fell. Up to that time there was no record of successful attack in the dark.

We were about clear of the Channel waters when we saw a trawler alter course and come straight for us. There was a warning out that the enemy some time before the War had purchased a number of French and British trawlers and, while keeping these vessels outwardly in their original guise, had fitted them with torpedo-tubes. With this warning in mind we sent up signals, but the little ship ignored them and came steadily on. Our gunners were on the point of opening fire on her when she hove to. Boarding her, we discovered that she was an unarmed fishing-craft that had come close to proclaim her nationality.

At three o'clock on the afternoon of Saturday, May 7, we picked up a series of SOS appeals purporting to emanate from the *Lusitania*. We could not credit that a harmless ship of

her sort, filled with passengers who probably included many people of neutral nationality, had been attacked. Also, her position as given, when we came to work it out, proved to be twelve miles inland. It was highly improbable that the *Lusitania* officers, having made the passage so often, would have made such an error. We suspected a trap to decoy us into a position for being torpedoed. Then the signals stopped.

Some hours later we 'spoke' another ship, an American oil-tanker, which told us that it had passed through the area mentioned in the messages, but that it had seen nothing of the *Lusitania*. Aboard the *Otranto* we flattered ourselves that we had acted wisely. But next morning we picked up a message from Poldhu which told officially of the *Lusitania* outrage. Even while we were reading the Poldhu message we were steaming through a wreckage-strewn area in which many corpses were floating. A Harrison ship, I have reason to believe, had been sunk there some hours previously.

It was surprising in those early days to see with what casualness some of the cargo-ships would ignore signals. As often as not the traders we met had to have a shot put across their bows before they would give us any attention. There was one large steamer we closed with that paid not the slightest attention to our order to heave to, and had to have a shot fired before she complied. Our boarding officer told me that her look-out had been asleep, and the helmsman so intent on keeping course that he had not seen us. But one wondered what her officers had been doing.

On board we had a naval doctor and two ratings who were going to join H.M.S. *Marmora*. We learned one day that we would be closing with that ship at six o'clock the following morning. A nasty sea was running when we sighted her, and the whaler we dropped had a lively time in transit. The warship, of course, did not put out her accommodation-ladder, but merely dropped a rope one overside. The medico, it was plain, was anything but happy in negotiating the 'Jacob,' and the expectation each delayed minute was to see him take a sousing. But stout arms planted him safely on the affair of

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ropes and slats at last, and it must have been a thankful man who found himself dryshod on the *Marmora's* deck.

The Cape Verde Islands came in sight the following morning, and in the afternoon early we dropped anchor in the harbour of St Vincent. Here lay the *Highflyer*, not long out of the engagement in which she had sunk the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*. On her I had my first real chance of seeing the effect of naval gunfire. Half of her bridge was shot away.

Ashore we were made greatly welcome by the fellows of the Western Cable Company. Their 'grog' cocktails were notably potent, but rather unpalatable until one got used to them. It was the getting used to them that revealed their potency. The cable company's men challenged the ship at cricket. There was no turf on their pitch, and the wicket was of matting. We had several good players on board, and had every confidence that we would give our challengers a run for their money. The arrangements for the match, however, included a preliminary visit for drinks at the club. It occurred to me in the club that our hosts were being particularly hospitable to two or three of our fellows, pressing them to have just another, and 'well—a binder!' Oddly enough, the fellows who were being treated with such liberality were our best players.

"Who's your best bowler?" I asked a junior among the cable chaps.

"That tall fellow over there is our fast man," he said unguardedly. "I'm the googly."

"Good egg!" said I. "Come and have a cocktail, and bring your long friend."

And as fast as our best bats were stood drinks I plied the two bowlers. If in the match our bats, as was probable, had difficulty in choosing between the two balls apparently sent down to them, the cable company bowlers just as probably had difficulty in making three out of the six stumps they saw, and *Otranto* won by ten runs.

§ ii

We had been told that the enemy were using Las Palmas as a submarine base, and our look-out for periscopes on patrol

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was incessant. It was a monotonous life and thrills were few and far between. We could not, under international law, remain more than twenty-four hours in any neutral country, which meant that we could seldom in those waters give general leave to the ship's company. The fact that we steamed at night without lights was an added discomfort in the tropics. With sunset the order passed to darken ship, and the hands had to go round closing every port and scuttle, fixing the dead-lights over them so that no ray of light could leak out. There was no chance of getting the dead-lights off for a breath of air even after turning in. It was always possible that some one would come along and switch on the light unexpectedly. And no smoking was allowed on deck, for even the glow of a cigarette could be seen quite a distance away.

Once in a way we would meet with other ships when we stopped for coaling. That was a treat for us. One morning, for example, we came on *Vindictive*, *Celtic*, and *Edinburgh Castle* at the Abrolhos Islands, off the coast of Brazil. There was a lot of party-giving that night, with sing-songs and yarn-swapping galore. Next day *Vindictive* organized a swimming gala. There was a natural pool about six feet deep that was guarded from the sharks by a rocky reef running out to sea. There were plenty of the brutes showing their triangular fins outside, but they were scared off by the surf breaking over the reef. It was a delightful party, but for myself the temperature of the water, which must have been at about eighty, was a disappointment. It had none of the tonic effect that is to be had from a plunge into the cool water round our own coasts.

Those rocks abound with lizards and spiders. Some of the spiders had bodies as big as walnuts and long, hairy legs. They looked venomous, but one of the *padres* had made a study of them, and could vouch for their harmlessness. Their eggs, of which great numbers could be found under the stones, were as big as currants, white, and soft-shelled.

The Abrolhos are uninhabited. Every now and then a party of six or seven men come out from the mainland to attend to the lighthouse built on them. They teem with bird-life,

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especially with boatswain-birds. These get their name from the long tail-feathers shaped rather like a marling-spike. We found them remarkably tame, for they did not move from their nests as we walked among them.

The monotony of our life, however, though we did our best to keep fit with boxing, fencing, and gymnastics, was beginning to tell on the men. They were growing uneasy from sheer staleness, and the officers were glad for the men's sake rather more than their own when it was announced that we were to call at the Falkland Islands. We made landfall on a Saturday morning and dropped anchor in the harbour of Port Stanley at noon. The inhabitants gave us a great welcome, and arranged games and concerts for the benefit of the ship's company.

I heard that there was a penguin colony on one of the smaller islands of the group, and got up a party to visit it. We landed on the south side, the colony being on the north, and had a walk of six miles before us. This was over rough country, gradually rising to a central hog's back, which reminded me strongly of the muskeg-swamp land of North-west Canada. We negotiated the hog's back and made our way down to the beach. Long before we saw them the birds proclaimed their presence by their smell. We came to the top of a run of low cliffs, and saw penguins in hundreds strutting about the beach or sporting in the water. And then we saw what looked like family affairs carried out 'by numbers.'

There was an old bird who seemed to be patriarch or sergeant-major. At a sudden hoarse cry from him all the birds on the foreshore and in the water gave up their diversions to line up and march up the beach towards the cliffs. We looked under these and saw that there were hundreds of penguins sitting on their nests and apparently awaiting the arrival of the shore contingent. It seemed that each of the newcomers knew which nest to make for. The shore contingent reached the nests, and as if on a given signal the sitting birds got off the nests and the other birds took their places. It would appear that Pa Penguin takes on an equal share of the hatching with

Ma. There was a sort of general muster of the birds that had been sitting, and when all nests were reoccupied they set off in a body to beach and sea to exercise themselves or go after food.

We went down into their midst, and here again, as with the boatswain-birds on the Abrolhos, there was no indication of fear. The penguins let us walk among them freely, and made no objection to our taking their flippers. I have a photograph of myself holding a bird in either hand by the flipper. Their ungainliness on land is quite comic, for with their black coats and white breasts they toddle like short-legged and flat-footed waiters. But in the water they are like living torpedoes. They dive with their flippers held to their sides, and simply cut through the water. Their awkwardness on land is most apparent when they run, for they invariably fall on their noses and try to gain speed by the help of their flippers. It is an extraordinarily clumsy movement, which leaves an odd-looking track in the sand.

Another strange sight which was shown to me on these islands was the 'river of stones.' This is an apparently dry *nullah*, but as one watches the stones can be seen moving slowly upward until the top ones roll forward an inch or two. Water beneath would seem the only explanation of what is a decidedly eerie and puzzling sight. The stones may be the moraine of a one-time glacier, but if the forward movement is as real as it appears it is hard to see why the supply of stones was not exhausted long ago.

§ iii

Our job was part of the dreariest that his Majesty's Navy had to carry out. We were only one of the many ships which had to patrol the eighty-five thousand miles of trade-routes, one unit of the great organization which saw to it that our country was kept from starvation and the Allied forces maintained with supplies. For months on end we kept at sea, and the crew had only themselves for company during long stretches. With that experience behind one it becomes easier

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to appreciate what a major, if less showy, triumph was Nelson's in maintaining the discipline and fitness of the crews in his salt-caked and sun-bleached ships during his long vigils in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. How ill-found his ships were compared with ours needs no underlining. Yet our job was beyond words dreary. The need to deal with a submarine or an enemy raider was a welcome break in the daily routine.

We could not, as I have already said, give our crew general leave in any neutral port. It had been dangerous in more ways than one, for not all the countries we visited were as neutral as their Governments would have had Britain think. On several occasions when ashore for mails I had to seek official protection. I still have a scar on my head from a stone thrown by a non-combatant. Enemy propaganda was very active along the coasts we had to patrol, and gross misstatements were widely circulated as to how the War was going for ourselves and our Allies.

We had to adopt all sorts of expedients for providing the men with exercise and diversion. Now and again we anchored off one of the many uninhabited islands of the Valdivian Archipelago, in the Southern Pacific. We would give the crew a run ashore and get up games for them. Whenever possible we would anchor off an island that swarmed with rabbits, arming the crew with sticks and sending them off hunting. This had the double value of exercising the men and providing them with a welcome change of diet, for we would get a boatload of rabbits. It disturbed our fellows very little that the island was as overrun with snakes as it was with conies. When opportunity arose we set the men fishing. I had made it my business to lay in a large stock of fishing tackle, and the brightly coloured fish the men caught provided another change in food for them. We were not at all certain to begin with which of those strange fish were safe eating, but we trusted the rough test—I believe it is an ancient Israelitish one—that the experienced sea fishermen among our crew suggested. They would dig a thumb-nail into the skin of a doubtful fish. If the scales came off it was edible. If not it might

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be poisonous. On that test we got along nicely, and had no cases of poisoning.

It may be imagined that our most successful expedient for keeping the men amused on board was the organizing of a ship's concert-party. I was appointed manager, and so had to discover our talent. It was really surprising what a lot of good stuff I dug out from among the men. There was, of course, no lack of singers, for most sailormen can pipe a stave of sorts, but we wanted a variety show.

At first the men were shy of coming forward, but we made progress. There was one chap who suggested to me, after a try-out rehearsal, that he might be able to do conjuring tricks if I would only ask the carpenter to help him in the matter of props. This chap, a corporal of marines, developed in very little time into a real showman. With the help of the carpenter and the ship's monkey he evolved a disappearing act which was one of the party's major successes.

The first part of the trick was the display of an empty box. This was placed on a table in front of a black curtain. Then Johnson, the monkey, was shown. Having been petted, he was carefully placed in the box and the lid shut on him. Waving his wand, the conjurer would command the little fellow to disappear. A member of the audience would be called and asked to tell the audience, after a look into the box, what he saw. Of course, the box would be empty, a confederate of the conjurer, under the table, having hauled Johnson out by the scruff of the neck under cover of the black curtain.

We happened to be in a foreign port one evening, and our principal guest was the Minister Plenipotentiary. He was received with great respect, and graciously consented to attend our concert. The conjurer did his turn, and reached that point in his chief trick where the monkey vanished. He called for a volunteer from the audience to come and examine the box. The distinguished guest got up at once and stepped up on the platform.

"Thank you, sir," said the performer, in his most carrying tones. "Will you please look into the box and tell the audience what you see?"

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The Minister approached the box and lifted the lid. He gave a slight start. Then a smile broke on his face.

He announced his finding with a single word, and the whole ship's company rocked. Johnson, in the darkness of the box, had not been idle.

Accident of another kind eventually gave the trick away. Without telling his assistant of his intention, the conjurer decided to substitute the ship's parrot for the monkey. Lorito was tame, but being put into the dark box ruffled his temper. When the assistant reached from under the table, expecting to find Johnson, Lorito caught hold of a finger with his powerful beak—and held on. A stream of profanity rose from under the table, to the unbounded satisfaction of the men in front.

We called for mails at a South American port where a number of British people were living. The Consul asked if they might visit the ship with their ladies. The captain not only gave permission, but promised the visitors a concert if they came after dinner. In the evening the ship looked gay. We had spruced ourselves up in great style. The visiting party took their seats with the captain and officers in the stalls, and the show began.

First turn was a song from one of the stewards, who had a fine voice. The next was a step-dance by a lad from Lancashire, the home of clog-dancing. This was always a popular item with the ship's company, who helped the performer in his rhythm by whistling shrilly through their fingers. Then appeared the funny man, drawing spontaneous yells of approval from his shipmates. His last instructions from the manager—myself—was that he was to cut out his patter.

Standing in the wings, I heard him finish first verse and chorus, and waited for the accompanist to get into the 'symphony.' But the performer broke straight into the forbidden patter. There was a frozen look on his face, as frozen a look as there was on mine as I realized what was wrong. The comic couldn't stop without stopping altogether, for he had learned the words of the song parrot-fashion. It was in my mind to walk on to the stage and yank him off, but I peered first of all

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through the curtains to see how the Old Man and party were taking it. They were rocking with laughter. The hotter the jokes became the more they laughed, ladies and all. I think the frozen look on the comic's face told them what was the real state of affairs. Probably it took some of the leer out of the gags. But if the ladies had not been the sports they were, accepting the jokes as sailor jokes got up for firing at sailors, the cold sweat that the manager was in might have been justified by real trouble later.

The ship's lyrist had the job of keeping our shows up to date with topical verses for the songs. He exercised all that licence which belonged to the shanty-man of the old sailing vessels. It was a chance to score off captain and shipmates, and anything served as a peg. All sailormen love to grumble, and I would have thought something was seriously wrong if I went the rounds without hearing a complaint. And our lampoonist let off steam in a healthy fashion for the crew. A cricket-match on board between officers and men, in which I had been bowled first ball by the bosun's mate, gave the lyrist one of his best chances. The bosun's mate was Clarke, and therefore 'Nobby.' Our encounter was celebrated at the next concert thus:

Now Nobby Clarke, the bowler.
Got old 'Gold-dust' for a duck;
Next time he wants to draw a sub
N.E. will be his luck!

'N.E.' is the abbreviation for "Not entitled." When a sailor has overdrawn his pay the writer puts a small N.E. against his name on the sheet. If he comes to the pay table and prepares to remove his cap, sailor fashion, to have his money put on it the master-at-arms usually mutters, "North-east, you!"

§iv

But for such light diversion the monotony of our life would have been intolerable. We stopped and searched suspicious craft, moving up and down and in and out of the normal routes, only occasionally breaking off to put into port to

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pick up mail. It was for this purpose that we visited Valparaíso.

Ships do not go alongside at this port, but lie off in the bay. Here several interned German cargo-boats were tied up. As we rowed ashore their crews lined the sides to glare at us. These ships were safe while they lay in neutral waters, but we licked our chops on the thought of them attempting to run for it. Their capture beyond the three-mile limit would have meant some nice prize-money for us. The idea was so fascinating that three of our young officers quite seriously contemplated boarding one of the German vessels and compelling the crew to take her out; but our captain got wind of the plan and quashed it.

It was at Valparaíso that Von Spee arrived after his victory at Coronel. The five thousand Germans in the port were so cock-a-hoop, so riotous, in their reception of the victor that our people had to keep out of the way. News of Sturdee's defeat of Von Spee off the Falklands rather altered the case.

It must be said that the German admiral had small taste for the jubilations of his compatriots. He was too chivalrous not to realize the weakness of the force that had so bravely offered him battle. And when at a banquet given in his honour he was called on to drink the toast of "damnation to the British" he lifted his glass to "our gallant enemy."

With some brother-officers off *Otranto* I was having a drink in the Royal Hotel when we suddenly saw the people scurry like ants from their houses into the *plaza*. The pictures on the lounge walls began to sway from side to side, and a large crack broke up the wall above the door. We dashed into the *plaza* and waited. It was an earthquake, but fortunately not serious, though several small houses were demolished. As it is an earthquake country we were told that nobody ever shuts a door here lest in a 'quake it should get jammed.

There was a restaurant near the jetty run by an ex-chief steward of the P. S. N. Company. His food was excellent, a fine change from the ship's war-time menus, and he treated his countrymen well and fairly. There was a huge tortoise, said to be two hundred years old, that wandered round the

tables of the restaurant. It was so big that a man could sit on its back and be carried around.

A popular dish in this port is of shell-fish called *choros*. This is a large mussel that, cooked in the shell, is very good. But I could not face up to what looked like a red oyster, but may have been a variety of sea-urchin. It grows in large lumps, as big as one's head, at the bottom of pier piles. The natives break them off from the wood or stone to which they are attached, and with a sharp knife cut through the shells. Inside are the red oysters in small cavities not unlike egg-shells. The look of them was enough for me.

On the way from Valparaiso to Coquimbo one of our officers fell sick. The doctor, who not long before had finished his hospital training, diagnosed the illness as jaundice at first, but very soon altered his opinion and said it was yellow fever. We made for Coquimbo as quickly as possible and landed the sick man in hospital there. But he died, and was buried in Coquimbo Cemetery. A sad circumstance attaching to his untimely death was the fact that just recently, at Punta Arenas, he had received a cable from his wife telling him that he was the father of a son. He was so delighted that he cabled home saying that, in commemoration of the event and place, one of the boy's names should be Arenas. This means 'sandy.' He was himself red-haired, and possibly the boy took after him, in which case the name will not be so inappropriate as it might seem.

The Consul at Coquimbo chartered six or seven horses for the *Otranto* officers, and after lunch we galloped along the fine sand to La Serena, a distance of six miles. It was a fine excursion, but we had not ridden for months, and some of us found sitting down difficult for a few days.

Our skipper, Captain Davidson, was keen on riding, and another time, at Coronel, he persuaded me, though I am anything but a keen horseman, to go with him to the Consul to see if the latter could provide horses.

We landed and were taken to the house of the French Consul. We were chatting with that official when his man came in and said that if the *caballeros* were ready so were

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the horses. We followed him out into the street and found a couple of military-looking fellows holding a horse apiece. One was a beauty, a stallion with a great arch to his neck and flaming red nostrils. The eyes of the Old Man glistened at the sight of him. He quickly got mounted. My beast was of a different sort, and there was a wicked gleam in his eye that I found very disconcerting. Even with the assistance of the two soldiers I had some difficulty in getting on his back. But once in the saddle I felt fairly all right.

We clattered out of the *pueblo* and saw in front of us a white road stretching for miles.

"See that white cottage about a mile ahead?" said the skipper. "I'll race you to it for a pound."

"Right!" I yelled, and off we went.

My little horse could go, but the big stallion soon left him behind.

The cottage which was the winning-post was still a hundred yards off when the Old Man's beast suddenly whirled round a corner. The Old Man shot off him at something of a tangent. I was just far enough behind to have time to prevent my horse from imitating the stallion's sudden veer. With a great effort I managed to pull up. I dismounted, threw the reins over the branch of a tree, and went to the field into which I had seen the skipper describe his parabola. He was sitting on a midden hugging his left hand with his right. From head to foot he was besmeared with the muck into which he had shot, and it smelled horrid.

The skipper smiled at me and exhibited his damaged hand. One of the fingers had been buckled clean back, as though he had fallen with all his weight on it. I gave him first aid and brushed him down a bit, then we walked back into the road.

He was just wondering aloud where his brute had gone when we heard a *clippity-clop, clippity-clop*, and down the side-lane came the horse, with a diminutive Chileño boy on his back. He pulled up easily when he reached us and dismounted.

"Where did you find him?" I asked in my best Spanish.

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"*Vamos, señor!*" said the urchin. "He always comes to the farm."

"Well, sir," said I to the skipper, "you had better mount, and we'll go to the farm and see if anything can be done for you."

I made to mount my own beast, but the Old Man was there first.

"I'm taking this one now," he said. "Nothing would induce me to mount that mad beast again."

There was no arguing with the ship's autocrat, such is the way of the sea—even on land. I was a bit scared of the brute, but the fact that a lad of twelve could handle him gave me courage. I got on his back, and down the lane we trotted. Within a short distance both horses turned into a gate and halted before the front door of a large farmhouse. It was filled at once by a stout and jolly-looking Chileño woman who had in her hand a stoup, or whatever the Chilean name is—it may be *botijo*—of red wine. It was a trifle rough to the palate, but it tasted good to us. The lady wouldn't hear of our paying for it. We were her guests. We raised our hats—or at least I did, for we never found the Old Man's—and took our leave of her.

The moment my horse got into the lane again he shot his neck forward and bolted. It was useless to try to check him. He was homeward bound, and nothing was going to stop him. That, at least, was my fervent hope. I have seen pictures of John Gilpin on his famous ride, and I'm certain that my progress must have been a very colourable imitation of his. As we passed the roadside huts the children ran *chi-yih-ing* in all directions, and hens scattered, squawking, in dust and feathers.

We neared the town, and my heart sank. Right across the road was a cart laden with logs. It looked to me at least six feet from the ground to the top of the load. The stallion saw it as soon as, or probably sooner, than I did. He made straight for it with increasing speed. I felt him gather himself under me, there was a tremendous heave, and over we sailed, with a clearance, I am sure, of quite a foot. I am

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convinced that if that animal had found a house in his way he would have had a go at it.

In very little time he was standing outside the house of the French Consul, his sides heaving mightily and covered with lather. But he seemed to have enjoyed himself thoroughly. About ten minutes later the Old Man turned up, safe and sound.

We thanked the Consul for getting us two such spirited beasts.

"Well, you see," said he, "the stallion hasn't been ridden for about a month. We thought he probably would be a bit fresh, but, knowing what fine horsemen the English are, we grasped the chance of getting him some exercise."

"And the other animal?" I asked.

"Oh, he belongs to the Commandant of Police. He's blind in one eye, and cannot see you when you go to mount him, or he would certainly bite you in the leg. Oh, an untamed fellow! There are days when even his own master can't handle him."

§ v

There was a funny incident on one of our visits to Coquimbo. The girls of the port came out to visit the ship, and as they were charming creatures in general the *Otranto* officers suggested getting up an impromptu dance for them in the evening. At the idea the lassies were at once enthusiastic, but a word from one of them turned rejoicing to woe. The day was Ash Wednesday, on which dancing would be a sin. We were in the port, of course, for only twenty-four hours. It looked, indeed, as if the poor girls were going to be done out of their dance. They put their heads together, however, and said it was possible that the difficulty could be got over without incurring a general penance. They would let us know, they said, within an hour or so. And, sure enough, within very little time of their going ashore we had a message back to say that we could spread ourselves on the arrangements. They would be turning up *en masse*.

And turn up *en masse* they did. They had a perfectly

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marvellous time. Of the fruit, sandwiches, and cakes provided for them what they could not immediately eat they carried ashore in their bags and pockets or in any receptacle they could procure.

It had not occurred to us that there would be any easy getting over of the religious difficulty, for we imagined that on the point of keeping a holy day the Church would be adamant. The girls, however, had gone to the local ecclesiastical authority and stated their case. Were they to be done out of their dance with the *oficiales ingleses* merely because the day happened to be a fast? Surely it was realized that months might elapse before another English ship would call, and that it might even be the last time that this particular big ship would come to Coquimbo? *Vamos*, then!

The local ecclesiastical authority saw reason. It offered a solution of the difficulty which had all the simplicity of genius. Merely a matter of postponing Ash Wednesday until the Thursday, when the English ship would have gone!

XV

ENEMY RAIDERS AND AGENTS

AT Coquimbo we received orders to proceed to the waters about Cape Horn and hunt for three enemy raiders known to be operating in that area. The *Moewe* and the *Seeadler*, two of the raiders, had sunk some of our ships and were menacing the trade-routes.

We were anything but sorry to get out of the tropics, for the conditions in which we had to run the ship made her very uncomfortable in the intense heat. We made right round to Rio de Janeiro for mails. This city, as the cruising habit is beginning to inform other than sailormen, has one of the finest and most lovely harbours in the world. From her visit to the port after her retreat from Coronel the *Otranto* was already known to the inhabitants, and several of the officers had good friends ashore. But in general the British residents gave us a most cheering and delightful welcome.

Our next port of call was Montevideo. Our anchorage here was off English Bank, three miles from the city. We were taking the opportunity of shipping some of the country's frozen mutton. The lighters were already alongside; our winches were chattering and the derrick-blocks whining as we hauled the carcasses on board. Suddenly a signal came through that a raider had been sighted outside the River Plate.

We immediately cast off from the lighters. Even now I can see the look of anguish on the face of the *proveedor* when he saw what was happening. The meat had been bundled into the ship as quickly as possible without any tally being kept of the individual loads. Our intention had been to take a quantity in bulk and pay for it when it was safely on board. With our sudden need to get out to sea I arranged for a careful tally to be kept of the amount consumed, so that a Navy bill for

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the total could be sent when all was gone. The *proveedor's* risk was certainly enough to make his face fall in anguish, for heaven knows on what calculation he could have been paid had we chanced to go to the bottom. In the end, however, he duly received a Navy bill for thirty thousand pounds of mutton.

Our rush to the open sea need never have been made, all the same. The 'raider' proved to be merely a P.S.N.C. ship homeward bound. But there was no question of returning again to Montevideo. We headed south for Tierra del Fuego, the land where the wind always blows. Within a few days' time we were entering the eastern end of the Strait of Magellan, named after the famous navigator whose exploits had filled my mind in boyhood. But I was to be heartily sick of his winding strait before we were done with it.

Our first objective was Punta Arenas to get orders from the Senior Naval Officer. The *Moewe* and the *Seeadler* were still at large. Our job was to capture or sink them. But they seemed to bear a charmed life. There were reports of them from here, there, and everywhere. First one or other was reported to have been seen in Smythe Channel. This inlet was scrupulously searched, but without success. Then we learned that Indians had seen a strange ship with two or three funnels off the island of Chiloe. Up northward we hared along the coast of Southern Chile, again to draw a blank; then off again to investigate some new rumour. So the game of hide-and-seek went on. The root cause of the raiders' elusiveness, however, was not a difficult thing to comprehend.

It is the custom of the British service to appoint regular Consuls at the large ports. But in small places the Consular office is given to a business man in the town, as often as not a ship's chandler. Such men are called commercial Consuls. The man at Punta Arenas was of this sort. He came aboard with mail, cables, and orders from the S.N.O. I went to talk to him one day when he was in the captain's cabin. I wanted to discover if I could get a supply of fresh vegetables for the ship's company. And it struck me, in general conversation with the Consul, that he was anxious to convince us these

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raiders had been reported by native Patagonians as lying behind Cape Horn—the real Cape Horn on the mainland, not the false one on an island which lies out some miles from the coast.

Our instructions were to join the *Glasgow* there and to begin an intensive search. The rendezvous made by *Glasgow* was also down south from the strait. It seemed strange that a German boat should be in that quarter without *Glasgow* hearing of it. But after taking mails aboard we set out for the meeting-place. We met the *Glasgow* and found she had no inkling at all of the rumour. The natives were emphatic about not having seen any strange ship in the neighbourhood.

The Consul at Punta Arenas called himself Brown. He was a big man, deliberate in speech and movement. One day he came to the ship with special information. As he was discussing matters in the cabin he seemed to be, for him, somewhat agitated. His cigar rolled from the table where he had placed it, and as he stooped to pick it up a large metal disk slipped out from under his waistcoat. It was hung round his neck by a silk ribbon. He failed to notice that it was exposed, and went on talking. I could see the modelling of the disk perfectly well. It represented a ship sinking bows first, her stern well out of the water, with people jumping frantically into the sea, and I could see the inscription on the medal. Although I could not translate it it was in German, and one word stuck out—"Lusitania." It was the medal struck by the Germans to commemorate the sinking of that ship. It was, by and large, a singularly odd thing for a British Consul to be wearing about his neck, surely? Brown saw my intent look, and, following it, discovered that the medal was exposed. He laughed and tucked it back under cover without explanation.

As soon as he left for the shore I reported what I had seen to the captain. He could hardly credit my story at first, but as I insisted he cabled a coded report to the Consul-General at Valparaiso. The matter was investigated, and Mr Brown proved to be a German named Braun. He had a good business in Punta Arenas, and in pre-War days had been, no doubt, an efficient British Consul. But that he had been allowed to

carry on since the outbreak of the War was amazing. With this sort of thing going on—certainly it was no isolated case—it was no matter for wonder that these raiders contrived for so long to elude the British ships.

§ ii

It was almost mid-winter at this time, and the weather was intensely cold. Patagonia is a very interesting country, but the inhabitants are a poor lot, dirty and half starved. We had frequent contacts with them in landing to ask whether any ships had been seen. It was at times difficult to get in touch with them, for on our approach they usually took to the bush. Then it was a matter of standing by in patience until fear left them or our demeanour persuaded them we meant them no harm, when they would creep to us in attitudes of submission. Discovering us to be friendly, they would make signs that they were hungry, and we usually gave them a bag of stale bread or biscuits. A Welsh missionary whom we met there told us that in times of acute want they were not above cannibalism. Their ordinary diet is of shell-fish, and their camps are piled round with heaps of the shells. As these are never quite cleared of the flesh, and as the flesh left in them decays rather than mummifies in that climate, the natives live practically in the midst of a most appalling stench. This, however, they do not seem to mind in the least.

On several occasions when, sighting the wisp of smoke arising from a camp-fire, we put ashore to seek for information we found only a toothless old crone crouching over a few lighted sticks. These old women were always too old and senseless to give us any news, and all we could do was to leave food with them and get back on board. I asked the missionary we met what such old women were doing solitary, fending for themselves.

“Oh,” said he, “the tribes such old women belong to are running short of food. When this happens, or the weather is too bad for the men to collect shell-fish from the shore, looks are cast about the tribe to discover which of them can best be

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spared to provide food for the rest. The old women who are of no more use habitually are the first victims. So that when an old crone, such as you've seen, finds the men of the tribe eyeing her and whispering among themselves she realizes it is time to take to the bush until days of plenty come round again."

The natives, when they got to trust us, developed a habit which, at first amusing, became something of a nuisance. They would follow us round in groups, listening to our talk. They couldn't, of course, understand what we were saying, but if one of us laughed the whole gang imitated him. If one of us coughed the lot coughed. And a sneeze from one of us would set them all sneezing over and over again.

A native who had been converted and who could talk a little English tried to tell me about a man who had lived among them for two years. He described the man to me as having a long beard, and indicated that the stranger did either a lot of writing or a lot of sketching. It occurs to me that the stranger might have been the French composer Saint-Saëns, for his *Danse Macabre* has for its central theme the death dance which the Patagonians play on their earthen pots. The stranger whom the native described was always asking the men to play for him.

I am inclined to think that the original inhabitants of this territory were fine specimens of manhood. Now and again even to-day one will encounter a man with a splendid frame. Darwin, it may be remembered, came on traces here of a prehistoric creature which seemed to have been used as a beast of burden by the original natives. It was in a cave in the fjord of Ultima Speranza that the bones were found of about a score of mylodons. The cave had been used as a stable, for it had a store of cut grass in it, together with dung-balls containing chewed grass, indicating that the monsters had been used either as beasts of burden or fatted for killing. The race that could handle such beasts must have been giants. They have, however, long disappeared, leaving but few poor traces of their splendour among the present starvelings.

In our landings in search of information we were for ever

coming upon what must have been relics of the Darwin survey—a picket-rod still standing, with a cross-piece let into its slot, perhaps a mark for the great scientist himself as he noted angles and distances with the help of his theodolite. And once we came on tragedy. In a rough hut of northern construction were traces of charred stones, with three skeletons of men beside them. We imagined them to be the bones of survivors from a shipwreck, but we found nothing that gave us a clue to their identity.

I am one of the few people who have actually stood on Cape Horn. A party of us landed one dull and stormy morning. We walked up the gradually rising foreshore on to a vast expanse of what we thought was heather growth. After we had walked over this for some yards a member of the party suddenly shot down through the growth, and the search for him revealed the fact that we were really treading on tree-tops. The prevailing winds in that quarter have for centuries bent the tops of the trees strongly inland, and throughout the years their branches have so intertwined as to form a stout network capable of bearing a man's weight, except, of course, for weak patches such as our companion had encountered. Apart from minor scratches and a bad scare, he was unhurt. But the undergrowth was so thick that we had no little difficulty in extricating him.

Our searching took us into many an inlet that was quite uncharted, and in these we had to take soundings as we went. Once, creeping slowly in such a channel, the ship came to a sudden stop. There was a grinding noise, and she heeled over in a list of more than forty degrees. We had run on to a submerged reef.

The carpenter and bosun went over the ship, taking soundings in the bilges, but found no sign of a leak. The ship was not making water, but holing might easily arrive. We were in a dangerous position. On the reef at an angle which threatened to put us on our beam-ends anything was liable to happen. The plates might split or part under the terrific strain, or some jagged pinnacle of the reef might pierce us under water.

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We all stood by the boats, and the collision mats were got out in readiness. We looked at each other with blank faces, wondering if marooning was to be our portion, or a long boat-trip in a very unfriendly latitude.

Suddenly, however, there arose the sound of a terrific crunching, and next moment the ship slid off the reef into deep water. Luckily it was the reef and not the ship that had snapped under the strain. Careful examination revealed no sign of damage, and we proceeded on our way. Many months passed before we could dry-dock the ship, and then examination of the plates found only the slightest trace of our having struck a submerged object. The captain had this spot surveyed, and a chart was sent to the Admiralty. The adventure meant our name going on the map, for the reef was dubbed "Otranto Rock."

One day we were steaming off the Horn. It was regular Cape Horn weather. We sighted a sailing-ship running under shortened sail. We closed with her and demanded her name and nationality. She replied that she was the *Svenson* out of Antofagasta in ballast for Bergen. We searched her decks with our glasses and saw that her helmsman was a woman, an upstanding creature in short blue skirt and red jersey, taking her trick at the wheel with all the vigour of a young man. It was something good to see, and it seemed fitting that the wife of the skipper should be a 'Vikingess.' We waved a farewell to her, and had a wave in return. A good-bye to the skipper—and we steamed away.

Many years later I read Captain von Luckner's story of the *Seeadler*. In it he told how one day, beating round the Horn, he saw a British armed merchant cruiser bear towards him to close for questioning. He quickly rigged up one of his young men in woman's clothes and put 'her' at the wheel. The cruiser hailed, and he gave the answers above recorded. The ruse succeeded, for the "sentimental English captain" did not think of search, but let him pass freely. Von Luckner thought that the cruiser was *Otranto*. This is telling him, if he does not already know, that it *was*!

§ iii

In all we spent two months hunting through the channels and inlets of Patagonia and Southern Chile before we had orders to return to Punta Arenas. Then we heard that the *Dresden* had been bayed some time before at the island of Juan Fernandez, out in the Pacific on a latitude not far under Valparaiso or Coquimbo, but miles north of the area we had been so patiently searching.

The *Kent*, *Glasgow*, and *Orama* rounded her up, and *Dresden*, finding that she was trapped, sent a boat with a flag of truce. The boat mistook *Kent*, which was the larger of the two warships, for the senior ship of the squadron, and the officers of that ship steered her away, meaning that the boat should go on to the *Glasgow*. The Germans, however, took the movement to mean a refusal to parley, and they opened fire. Our ships replied. The position of the *Dresden* was hopeless, and her crew came on deck to jump over the sides and swim ashore. At the same time their ship began to sink. They had opened the sea-cocks.

Some time later *Otranto* put in at the island, and we saw the grave where thirty-five German dead were buried. Only a simple wooden cross adorned it, with the wording at the top, "They died for the Fatherland."

Juan Fernandez, the island Defoe had in mind when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*, is a possession of Chile. It has a Naval and a Civil Governor, to whom, at our calling there, we had to pay an official visit. Our visits were formally returned. At least, the Naval Officer came on board and was shown into the wardroom. As interpreter I had to make courtesies clear between him and the captain. After conversation had gone on for a minute or two the captain put a query: "Where is the Civil Governor?"

"In the boat," the Naval Officer replied.

I was sent to fetch him along. But 'his Nibs' was not in the boat. He was on the gangway arguing with our quartermaster as to how many crayfish he ought to part with for a very worn pair of the quartermaster's pants.

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On the West American coast our work frequently pertained to matters of the Secret Service. One morning, as the ship was passing close inshore, I saw people bathing on the beach. There was no sign of a village or town, and I brought the ship's glass to bear. I was astonished to see that the bathers were girls in very smart bathing-suits. This seemed so unusual to the skipper, when brought to his notice, that he decided to put into the shore to make inquiries. As we pulled towards the beach the girls left the water to run up the sand and disappear into a tent. They left on guard a youth of about nineteen or twenty. I jumped ashore, went up to him, and addressed him in my best Chileno:

"Can you tell me if any strange ships have been seen passing here?"

He answered in pure Castilian. He was obviously not an ordinary native.

"Do you speak English?" I asked.

"I ought to," said he. "I was at Charterhouse for four years."

His sisters—the girls—had been in Paris at the outbreak of the War, and he at school in England. Their father was President of the republic, and they were all staying at their seaside house.

The girls reappeared in smart frocks, and we were taken through a small copse to the house. There we were introduced to the President, who entertained us royally. He asked us if we would care to go shooting with him to Coloncha. If so he would be glad of our company the following morning. So next day the captain, the doctor, and myself went ashore. We were met by the President in a Buick, and set off inland for the shoot.

In this part of the country there were no roads, and the driver was a *peón*—that is, an Indian with Spanish blood in him. He was far too proud to have anything to do with the mechanism of the car. To attend to this he carried with him a native boy, who had to find transport lying flat on the foot-board.

We were speeding along dust-tracks when suddenly the

driver stopped. A chasm, probably made by an earthquake, was right ahead. To get past it he swung the car round almost at right angles, and in doing so brushed the side of the motor through some stiff shrubs. When I looked over the side to see if any damage had been done I saw that the native boy had disappeared; he had been swept clean off the footboard. I touched the President on the shoulder and drew his attention to the fact. He glanced over the car-side.

"What a nuisance!" he said. "Still, we can pick up another in the next village."

In the next village the little church had the twin spires that are usual in this part of the country, but between the spires was stretched a wireless aerial. On the pretence of having a look at the church I begged for a moment's halt. I strolled into the church, and there found an old native in charge of a very fine De Forrest receiving set. We were in a neutral country, so nothing could be done about it; but it was certain that this out-of-the-way station was picking up messages. It was not very likely that the old native could make head or tail of any of ours in code, but nothing was easier than their dispatch to Lima for deciphering there.

The shooting-party made a nice break for us, and we got back to the ship feeling immensely the better for it.

We had not gone very far up the coast when we had an urgent message bidding us return to Callao, the port of Lima. When we arrived there I went ashore with the ship's papers and called on the Consul. There was a bluejacket, I noticed, hanging about the outer office as I passed into the inner one. The Consul told me that this bluejacket had been left in hospital by one of the British ships, and that we were to take him on board with us.

It is usual for a seaman, left in any foreign port, to be sent home by the Consul, D.B.S. The idea of picking up the man annoyed me, but there was nothing to be done about it. So I told the bluejacket to take his dunnage down to the waiting picket-boat and to stand by until I came back to it.

When we got on board I left the bluejacket standing at the end of the gangway while I reported the matter to the cap-

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tain. Then I went along to arrange for putting him on one of the watches. I asked him how he came to be left in Callao, if he had his discharge from hospital, and if he had any papers at all. To my surprise he drew me out of earshot of anyone hanging around and whispered, "Tell the captain I must see him."

I looked at the chap. He wasn't, to me, an altogether convincing bluejacket. His hands, for one thing, were too well kept. I took him along to the captain's cabin. He stepped inside, briskly saluted, and turned to me.

"Shut the door, please," he said—"and the porthole." Then he addressed the captain: "Can we possibly be overheard?"

"What the hell . . . ?" said the Old Man.

"Secret Service," interrupted the bluejacket.

The captain sent me outside to see that nobody was hanging around. I made sure there wasn't, and went back to hear more.

The gist of the ensuing colloquy was that *Otranto* was to repair the following night to a spot in the Pacific Ocean, longitude and latitude given, to reach it by two o'clock in the morning. At that hour, proceeding quietly on a given course, we were to switch on our searchlights. On our starboard bow we would discover a Chilean ship. Aboard her would be a German naval officer, one Captain Krauss, who had the job of recruiting reservists from interned ships in ports along the coast and shipping them back to the Fatherland as Swedes and Finns in sailing-ships and steamers going to their supposed native countries.

As acting interpreter I was to go with the boarding-party and repair, once we were on the ship, at once to the purser's office and search the passenger-list for the name "Jacobs." This was the *alias* of the man we were after. He had to be brought on board the *Otranto* as prisoner.

It all worked out as the 'bluejacket' had explained. Two hours after midnight of the following day we switched on starboard searchlights, in the fierce rays of which the Chilean ship showed up like silver. Our new hand was coming with us to identify Krauss. I pointed out to him that his face was too

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pale and his hands were too white, facts which might arouse suspicion among the other men in the boat. He did not want anyone aboard to know who he was. He suggested staining his face and hands, and asked me if I thought cocoa might do. With the nasty sea that was running there was a chance of shipping a lot of spray, and I didn't see cocoa lasting out the boat's passage.

"A weak solution of permanganate of potash will give you a good stain," I told him, "and it won't harm you."

He went off at once to try the dodge. Unfortunately he over-estimated the amount of crystals needed, and showed up almost the colour of mahogany. It took him more than three months to wear off the stain.

The boat was lowered, and down the Jacob's ladder we swarmed, taking with us an armed guard of marines. Presently we were shinning up the ladder of the Chilean vessel. The officer in charge of the boat-party went straight to the bridge to talk with the captain, and I made my way to the purser's office. Our sudden appearance out of the night had created great consternation among the passengers, of whom the ship must have been carrying about four hundred. They came running out of their cabins in all sorts of night attire. I have never seen such a mixture—pyjamas, night-dresses, *peignoirs*, nightcaps—even underclothing.

The passenger named Jacobs, I found, was occupying Cabin 53. I asked the purser to take me to it in a hurry, and he led me to a series of cabins on the promenade deck. At the same time the boarding officer came down from the bridge with the ship's captain. I tried the door of Cabin 53, but it was locked. I rapped on it sharply and called on Captain Krauss by name to open up.

There was no answer.

I knocked again and repeated the order.

Still there was no answer.

"Go carefully," the captain of the ship, an Irishman, advised *sotto voce*. "The man in there is dangerous. Ten to one he'll come out shooting when he does open the door."

We had four marines with loaded rifles at the ready on

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either side of the door. Krauss had little chance. I rapped on the door once more.

"Captain Krauss, I shall count ten. If your door isn't opened by then it will be forced."

I started to count, and at "Nine!" the door was slowly opened. In the light of the cabin a man stood dressed in a long nightshirt that reached down to his ankles. His square head, close-cropped, was typically German.

At first he pretended not to understand English. But when it was insisted that he had to pack his gear and come with us to the *Otranto* his English was at once fluent and forcible. On the floor of the cabin was a heap of ashes, still smoking. He had burned all incriminating papers before opening the door. In spite of this he kept protesting that his name was Jacobs, not Krauss, that he was a Chilean subject, and that the outrage on his liberties would have to be accounted for to his Government. He refused to walk down the gangway to the waiting boat. And, although it is against regulations to carry a handcuffed man in an open boat, we were forced to put the 'darbies' on him and carry him down to the boat, bundling his baggage in after him.

Once he was safely aboard *Otranto* we hurried him round to the Falkland Islands, where he was interned 'for the duration.'

Krauss had been one of the most effective of the many German secret agents in South America. He had done a large amount of propaganda dissemination in Chile and Peru, and the stories he managed to get published in the local papers were of such an ingenious sort that it was hard to convince even friendly people that they were lies.

XVI

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So long had we been in the Pacific without docking that the ship's bottom had become fouled. We were ordered to proceed to Esquimalt for as speedy a refitting as was possible.

The people of Victoria, to which city Esquimalt Harbour is adjacent, gave us a marvellous welcome. The men were invited to dances, games, and concerts, and the first two weeks of our stay were a continuous round of enjoyment. The officers of the ship were made members of the Golf Club, and invitations to week-end salmon-fishing and other sporting activities poured in on us.

We were six weeks in Esquimalt altogether, and, looking back on that period of happiness, so wonderful after the months of but briefly relieved strain, I would say that we were lucky in being sent to refit in such an environment. If I were given choice of a place in which to end my days I should without hesitation plump for Vancouver Island. It is not only lovely in itself, but its inhabitants have a happy serenity which is infectious. The climate of the country is rather like that of England, but more stable by far. The summer behaves as it should, and so does the winter. The planning of outdoor activities need seldom be done contingent upon the weather.

The great spot of concentration for the *Otranto* officers was the Oak Bay Golf Club, for the members there adopted us completely. We might, from the way the regulars treated us, have been life-long friends. They brought us—perhaps the best proof of their friendliness—into all their jokes. The eighteenth hole of the Oak Bay course stands within very few yards of the 'nineteenth.' But from the tee of the eighteenth the green is blind. Coming home one afternoon, I drove

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off from the eighteenth and had a very satisfactory drive. From the look of it I could be fairly certain I was straight and 'pin-high.' My opponent was not so successful. His drive had a bit of a slice on it. I waited until he got himself out of trouble, and walked over to the green. My expectation was to see my ball sitting nice and pretty; but it was nowhere in view. While my opponent waited for me to play on to the green I hunted round the verges, but without success. Then a hail came from one of the members who were sitting on the veranda: "What's the matter with looking in the hole?"

It was with no expectation of finding my ball that I walked across the green, but, sure enough, nestling by the pin in the cup was my ball. My surprise and delight at holing out in one may be imagined. In the clubhouse congratulations were showered on me, and, of course, I carried out the time-honoured ritual of standing drinks all round. My feat, I think, was recorded in the club notices.

But two days later I learned that the practical joker of the club had seen my ball land at certain putting distance from the hole and had sneaked across to tip it into the cup.

Christmas was only a week ahead. Several ratings had been sent home, as had a few of the officers, and replacements had arrived. The festivities for Christmas Day had been arranged on a stupendous scale. Never had a ship's company had such junketing to look forward to. Our concert-party was rehearsing concentratedly on the show which it was giving in the local music-hall on Boxing Night. But naval men propose and their lordships of the Admiralty dispose. We got orders to sail on Christmas Eve.

That Christmas week was one of the unhappiest I ever spent in my life. Every one aboard was plunged in gloom the night we left, because in addition to the balking of all our marvellous plans we were missing our English mail. On Christmas morning it was learned that the leading shipwright had disappeared, leaving a note to say that, rather than go back on patrol, he was putting an end to himself.

Two nights out I was called along to the fo'c'sle to take the

dying statement of a fireman who had opened the veins of his wrist with a safety-razor blade and was bleeding to death. The following day one of the petty officers fell down a hatch and was picked up unconscious, with severe concussion.

On the fourth day out we received the order to put into San Diego, one of the principal American aviation bases on the Pacific. When we steamed into harbour a fleet of machines flew out to greet us, circling round and performing all sorts of aerial acrobatics. Whether our quartermaster was watching this performance instead of the compass I do not know, but a sudden jolt informed us that the ship had gone aground. Fortunately we had run our nose only into a mudbank, and when the tide flowed we were able to get off without much difficulty. But this end to a week of depression and accident did nothing towards cheering up the ship's company.

The Americans, however, gave us a fine welcome, and we were greatly impressed by the obvious efficiency of the air arm of the American service. An open invitation was given to the *Otranto* officers to 'go up,' but our captain passed an order that none of us were to go on flights. Perhaps wisely, for accidents were still fairly common, and we could not afford the risk of losing a perhaps valuable officer. We sailed out of San Diego with every manifestation of goodwill from our new allies.

On the run down-coast we had word that a raider was operating about the entrance to the Panama Canal, and it was thought that he might be using the Galapagos Islands as a coaling base. These islands belong to Ecuador, and lie about six hundred miles off the mainland on the equator. There are twelve large islands in the group, with only two that are inhabited, so that there was every possibility indeed of a raider using one as a secret rendezvous with his colliers.

As we passed one of the islands which the sailing notice said was uninhabited smoke was seen rising from the fore-shore. We altered course and went in as close as was safe to lower a boat. The captain and myself went ashore to investigate.

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There was no sign of life as we approached the beach, but when we landed and went above tide-level we came upon some ashes that were still smouldering, as if they had recently been half doused. I had myself a distinct feeling that we were being watched, but the undergrowth fringing the foreshore was so dense that nothing could be seen. I remembered the lesson I had been given by old Rain-in-the-face in the Peace river country, so I dropped my revolver to my side. Then, holding my left hand up palm forward and with the fingers spread, I walked up the beach.

In a few moments there came a crackling from the undergrowth and three natives came out to meet me with the same gesture. We essayed conversation, but I had a lot of difficulty in making them understand. The sight of the armed cruiser had frightened them. I believe they had the impression that we were going to take possession of the island. But when they had the assurance that we were friendly they invited us by signs to follow them to their village. They led us through dense jungle by a very narrow path, to which, they made it quite clear, it would be better for us to keep strictly. We had with us one of the ship's dogs. He made a dash away from the path after something he saw moving, and in a little time we heard from him a piercing howl. He came running back to the path, spun round and round several times, and dropped dead. He had been bitten by a venomous reptile.

It was a day of glaring heat, which when the path gave into a sandy plain became scarcely bearable. After mounting a small hill, however, we saw in front of us a perfect forest of orange-trees, with ripe fruit in large quantities waiting to be picked. On the invitation of the natives we picked some to quench our thirst. Then we arrived at the village.

There was about the place something that was extremely pleasing, but that at first was too subtle for understanding, as if faint but charming odours permeated the air. No flowers were to be seen, but shrubs in large quantity and of great variety grew round the huts. It was they that made the air so delightful, for they were all sweetly and differently aromatic.

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I discovered later that there are three hundred and fifty varieties of plants in this group of islands, and that many of them are unknown on the American continent—the nearest mass of land. I have heard it deduced from this fact that the Galapagos formed part of a lost continent.

Various courtesies being gone through, we asked if we might buy a supply of oranges. The natives conveyed to us that our men might come ashore and pick as much of the fruit as they liked. The trees were growing wild. We sent off two barges with fruit-pickers, and I should think they carried five thousand oranges out to the ship. The barges themselves were not only laden to the gun'le, but the men took off their jumpers and, tying the sleeves together, made temporary sacks out of them. The ship reeked of oranges for a week.

There was little use in giving these natives money, but they seemed to think themselves very fairly treated when I gave them a barrel of flour and four pounds of tea. I took the flour ashore on the day after the fruit-picking, and found that our friends had arranged for a ceremony of some kind.

The headman, or chief, brought a young girl with him when he came to meet me. While he and I conversed this damsel went down to the water's edge with line and hook, quickly yanking out a fish from the little lagoon. It was about the size of a good herring and looked rather like a mullet. She put the fish among some hot embers. After a few minutes, picking it out by the tail, she wrapped it in a palm-leaf and brought it to the headman. He split the fish down the back and opened it with the palm-leaf. Then he broke it in half and gave one portion to the girl and the other to me. I concluded that I was meant to eat it, and I did so, finding it very good indeed. The damsel put away her share too.

Then the chief took the girl's hand and mine and joined them, and I realized that unwittingly I had taken unto myself a wife. I had, however, to get back to the ship at once, and the honeymoon was of the briefest.

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§ ii

Our search of the Galapagos group failed in its main object, and we returned to patrol the mainland coast. By this time authentic news of the War had got through to the Pacific countries, and the people of Peru and Chile were beginning to see how things were really going. We called in at Callao, where, after some entertaining of the Peruvian officials, we were invited to luncheon.

Actually while this function was in progress news was brought that a Peruvian ship had been sunk by German submarines off Jamaica. Our hosts were properly indignant. Their friendliness towards us warmed, and in the discussion that followed the luncheon it was decided that Peru ought to throw in her lot with the Allies and declare war on Germany.

We found, generally speaking, that the naval parties in the South American republics were in sympathy with Great Britain and her allies, but that the military people were pro-German. The division is easily understandable when it is remembered that, while English seamen were to be found in the English-built ships of the republican naval and mercantile marines, their armies had been instructed, and in some cases were officered, by Germans.

The war which we had thought would last six months had dragged along for two years. Most of the raiders had been cleared from the Pacific seas. Our job of patrolling the Western American coasts was petering out. It was no surprise to us, therefore, to receive orders to make for Sydney, preparatory to taking up fresh duties elsewhere.

In our voyage *via* New Zealand we called in at Easter Island, one of the loneliest spots on this earth, and one of the most mysterious. Although the island is of no greater size than twelve miles by fourteen, it contains hundreds of remarkable statues. Not so many as were there originally are left standing to-day, but well over a thousand have been counted. They tell of a civilization long departed, of which the islanders themselves can give no account.

The island belongs to Chile, which puts a naval officer in charge as Port Official, and when we dropped anchor this personage came out to pay the customary visit. He had no English, but as acting interpreter I had from him the interesting story of the visit to the island of the German Pacific Fleet in the early days of the War.

It was the twelfth of October, he said, that he heard, when having breakfast, such shouting as that which habitually greeted the appearance of the regular schooner. He was sure, however, in his own mind that this vessel was not the occasion of the noise, for it was nowhere due. He looked along the horizon, but saw nothing, and he concluded that the Kanakas were trying to play a joke on him. This is a form of amusement to which the Kanakas are greatly addicted.

Deaf to their cries that they saw smoke, the official went on with his breakfast, declaring that there was no ship.

"I might have remembered," the officer told me, "what splendid sight the Kanakas have. In a very little time I was admitting that I had been wrong, for gradually not one but three columns of smoke began to appear on the horizon to the north-west. 'A veritable invasion!' I thought. 'Was it a powerful force,' I asked myself, 'coming to take possession of the island?' If so, with only one old rifle and three Kanaka boats attempt at resistance would be a very futile gesture, *verdad?*

"I sent to tell our one Englishman of the approach of the ships, and he came to discuss the matter with me. We were greatly puzzled, for it was now plain that the vessels were warships. For what purpose could so large a force be coming to Pascua? Before I left Chile there had been no hint of impending international complications. There had been, it was true, some straining of relations between Japan and the United States, but not so much as would be likely to lead to open rupture. But this was the only idea in my mind, and I put forward the theory that Japan was sending a squadron across the Pacific to block the Panama Canal to U.S. shipping.

"'Not at all likely,' my English friend declared. 'War

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nowadays is an impossibility. The canal is perhaps open to traffic, and this is part of the British Navy going back to England from Australia *via* Panama.'

"The three ships were now close in. I hoisted the Chilean flag and, with the Englishman, hurried down to the beach. We launched one of the boats and got alongside the flagship even before it or any of the others dropped anchor.

"They were German ships. The flagship did not lower her gangway for us. Only a rope-ladder was put over the side, and when we had with difficulty climbed up by that we were not permitted farther inboard than the ship's rail. There we were kept waiting for a long time, too long a time for politeness, and then an officer came to conduct us to the cabin of the captain. With the captain was the fleet paymaster, and he spoke a little Chileno.

"In my capacity as port official I asked for the names and tonnage of the ships, the place and date of their sailing, and their destination. These, you understand, were necessary for record in my books as port officer.

"The Germans gave me no immediate answer. They had a discussion in their own language for several minutes before the paymaster replied.

"The ships, he said, were on a voyage of research round the world. They had come from China and were proceeding to Valparaiso. There they would leave all necessary information, details of which would be of little use to us at Pascua. That, of course, was quite irregular, but my protests on the point were disregarded.

"When these truncated formalities were over I asked for news of the outside world—what was going on. They declared that they themselves had been out of touch for ten days, since leaving the Marquesas Islands. The Panama Canal was open for traffic—it seemed that the revolution was still going on in Mexico—otherwise nothing of importance had occurred. They turned the conversation by asking if meat was procurable on the island. They were ready to take a large supply. In this my English companion could help them, and they settled a contract with him at a fixed price per kilo.

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It was agreed that next day the Englishman should have the cattle driven down to the beach, and the German sailors would land to help with the killing, dressing, and loading.

"We begged them to give us any newspapers they could spare, no matter how old, but they said that they had none at all, having come from China. We had then to say good-bye to them until the following day.

"But, *amigo*," said the Easter Island official, "it was strange to see with what coldness, with how little courtesy, we were treated by those officers! There was no invitation to look over the ship, none to walk into the wardroom for a little wine, a smoke. The Englishman when we landed had to be busy with his arrangements about the cattle, and I was left alone, very sad and unhappy. It is not very often that we have a chance on Pascua to have contact with the so distant great world, and to be denied in this way was wounding. Having been received with such coldness and mistrust made it impossible for me to go aboard again. I was mystified. Then the Kanakas came to tell me that they had not been allowed to communicate with the ships. They were very angry, and they wanted me to make the Germans take their ships away.

"The following morning, unable to hold myself back, I went out to the squadron and reached the flagship just as they were hoisting the German ensign at the stern. Hat in hand, I stood at attention while the band played their national anthem. When the ceremony was over an officer turned to me and spoke to me in French.

"'The paymaster and other officers are about to land,' he said brusquely. 'You can wait for them ashore!'

"'*San' Dios!*' said I to myself as I was pulled to the beach. 'Is this the German discipline, which, even on a voyage of research, finds no time to be commonly polite? *Madre mía!*' I was very angry, and I swore I would not return to the ships even on invitation.

"But if the Germans could be impolite there was no reason for a Chilean to imitate their bad manners. My house, as you see, is nearest to the beach. I became active about the prepa-

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ration of a light repast. With the coffee I would serve sweetmeats, and I would give the German boors a lesson—*comprendre?*—in hospitality.

“Boatloads arrived ashore from the ships, and the crews worked hard and long under the eyes of their officers. After months of abstinence it must have been cruel to be so driven while our island girls hovered around, showing with their smiles their amorous nature! The officers who had landed were very incommunicative, but I did exchange a word or two with some in French. In the hope, I confess, of gaining some information I asked several to my house—some for breakfast, some for coffee, and others for bananas and sweet potatoes. The paymaster, as I have said, knew a little Spanish. He had spent some time in Chile. Him I showed round the village, and later I took him to see the beautiful crater of Rapanui and the wonderful statues, of which there are so many on our little island. But he would not talk with me about matters in the outside world.

“Besides the Englishman, we had among us a German, a man of about forty, who had travelled a great deal in Africa, Central America, and Mexico. He claimed to be an agriculturist, and said he was in Pascua to study the cultivation of tobacco. But I had never seen him plant anything, although that, I understand, is the preliminary to cultivation.

“There was also on the island a Frenchman from Brittany. He is with us still. He has worked for years on Juan Fernandez, and is looking into the possibility of starting a *langosta* [lobster] industry here. Our remaining European is an Italian sailor. He has been shipwrecked eleven times, the last time being cast up here. He thinks he has taken enough chances with the sea, and means to finish his days on the island, for he thinks his relatives must have assumed him dead long since.

“Our white element, you see, is quite cosmopolitan, with no nation represented more than once. We held an international conference that night when the sailors had gone back on board, and we reached the conclusion that, wildly

improbable though it might seem, war had broken out between France and Germany. The hint that led us to this conclusion lay in the fact that one of the German officers had covertly asked a Kanaka if a French ship had passed. From the way he described the ship he must have meant the *Mont-calme*. We decided to go on board and put the question directly to the captain.

"The German resident came with us. His object, he said, was to get as much information as he could, and to secure a newspaper if possible from one of his fellow-countrymen. But our questioning was ineffective. The Germans would give us no information whatever, but stuck to their original story of the research voyage. We asked why the squadron behaved so mysteriously, lying as they did with no lights showing; why all gear looked so warlike, with decks cleared for action; what was the meaning of the fact that one of the cruisers had been grounded and careened for repairs to her bottom. But it was all to no purpose, *amigo*," said the Pascua official. "The Germans kept their mouths shut and told us nothing.

"I had, however, just one hint from the captain before we left," the port officer went on. "He told me, on promise of reserve, that war might break out at any moment, because international relations were in a state of tension. They had expected to receive a mail at Easter Island, and had been very disappointed when I told them there was none on hand. They had hoped the mail would tell them affairs had become smooth again in Europe.

"But the German resident, who remained aboard all day and was much more amicably received, had better luck than we had. Between glass and glass of beer he not only learned of the outbreak of war, but he managed to secure three copies of a German paper published in Santiago, dated round about September the twenty-seventh. He was much too drunk to read them to us when he flourished them, but we seized on them and with much labour made out from them that war was universal. Germany and Austria were fighting against France, England, and Russia. It was not known which side

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Italy would support. The other powers were divided: Belgium, Holland, and Denmark for Britain; Norway, Sweden, and Turkey for Germany. Spain was undecided, but was inclined to assist France. The United States were on the point of declaring war on Britain, hoping to annex Canada, which had rebelled. India was in the throes of revolution, and Australia had declared itself a republic. Japan was on the side of England. The Germans, after invading Belgium, had taken Calais, and were at the gates of Paris. London had been destroyed by a fleet of Zeppelins, and seven British dreadnoughts had been sunk by a German torpedo-boat flotilla. The cause of the War was the assassination of the Emperor of Austria, the assassin at his trial having sworn he was in the pay of the French Government."

Thus the port officer of Easter Island, or Pascua. If his dates were right the German organization in the Pacific must have been perfect to have put newspapers from Santiago, in Chile, aboard the Pacific fleet within a fortnight of publication. The Chilean official had spent three years of such apprehension regarding the War, not knowing what was happening, that the thing had got completely on his nerves. The fact that we were able to relinquish patrol of the West American coast was the first piece of good news he had, and it cheered him up considerably.

Our run from Easter Island to Sydney was made without event. The marvellous reception we had there was no sooner over than we were ordered to return to Rio de Janeiro. The Admiralty at long last had adopted the sensible measure of convoying food-ships.

From Rio to England we had a slow and uneventful passage, escorting twelve decrepit tramps. They kept breaking down in turns all the way over, but though hourly we expected attack from German submarines, which abounded in the Atlantic, our luck still held.

Our absurd luck. It began to look as if *Otranto* was a favourite of fortune. She had escaped the Coronel disaster, where no enemy ship but had the heels of her by six knots; she had done light duty on the fringes of the Falkland scrap;

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she had chivvied *Dresden* about the watery warren of Patagonia and Southern Chile; she had twice run aground without damage; she had done three years' arduous and dangerous duty without harm.

We were sent from England to New York to escort a convoy of troopships, and there was no sign of the enemy. We were almost boastful about our luck.

XVII

THE END OF H.M.S. "OTRANTO"

DOWN Fifty-fifth Street, New York, on the morning of September 27, 1918, the tenement windows were brave with flags and bunting. Along the pavements excited women and children were grouped with rattles, whistles, flags, and paper streamers in their hands—anything, in fact, with which to make noise or a show.

Along the wharves at the western end of the street, on the Hudson river, lay a dozen fine ships, passenger ships by their lines, but now without the lively paint on funnel and hull that made them so attractive in pre-War days. Some were painted all over in a level drab grey. Others sported irregular rhomboids and streakings of differing tints and shades—the war-time camouflage. The funnels of all were caked with the salt of the sea spray, evidence of grim battle with the storms, and the blistered paint of the stacks told of fierce heat long kept in their furnaces to maintain steam pressure for extracting the last ounce of power from the engines. Inside those ships were stripped bare. The gay interior decorations, with everything else inflammable, had gone. The ships were mere shells.

At the end of the line lay H.M.S. *Otranto*, her eight 6-inch guns spotlessly clean under their covers. She typified the armed merchant cruiser, that oddly adapted but valuable adjunct to the designed fighting ships of the Navy. Inside, like the liners with her, she was a shell. But she differed from them in the special reinforcements to her structure that made possible the mounting of her guns. Her duty was to see the other twelve in safety across the Atlantic.

A great crowd blackened the wharves. They eddied, ant-like, on the fringes, and their murmuring rose like the noise of the sea. But with the coming of a distant faint sound, the sound of military music, their eddyings stilled and their

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murmuring hushed. The field of their faces, like the tops of standing corn in a sudden wide wind, gleamed white in a spreading ripple as they turned to listen. And in the hush that fell upon them momentarily another noise gave background to the martial music—the *swish-swish, swish-swish* of regularly marching feet. And now along the gaily bedecked street, between the flutter of waved flags and streamers, bringing with them a tidal-wave of cheering, came rank after rank of American citizen soldiers, an endless stream of them, marching steadily in their olive drab with a glittering spear-head of colour—the band in gay uniform and with their sun-reflecting instruments. Here came the passengers for the twelve liners, a contingent of 'dough-boys' bound for the Western Front. The wave of cheering, of brandished rattles and blown whistles, ran ahead of them like fire along a fuse, caught in the packed crowd on the wharves, and exploded into a roar.

The embarkation went on smoothly. The bulk of the dough-boys, unmoved by the cheering of the strangers on the wharves—for the troops mostly came from the Southern States—tramped purposely on board, leaving the more ebullient minority to answer the mob enthusiasm. Now and again an odd one of them would turn with curt wave of farewell to a picked unit of the crowd—mother, sister, girl. But the general urge was to get embarkation over, to see the mooring-lines cast off, and to face the beginning of the great adventure. They were going, those boys, to show Europe the fighting quality of a young country. They were going to clean up the mess into which the Old World had allowed itself to fall. Their confidence in themselves was absolute.

At the last moment, when the convoy was about to warp out one by one, a fresh batch of soldiers arrived for transportation—eight hundred and fifty of them. The actual troopships were full, but there could be no thought of leaving these additional men behind. They were badly needed in Flanders. There was a hasty conference between officials, and the captain of the *Otranto* agreed to give the fresh contingent transport. Food-supplies were rushed on board for the additional mouths,

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and a canteen was installed for the provision of those extras—sweet corn, chewing-gum, hot dogs—that make the American soldier happier than ration supplies can. The additional provision occupied time. It was not until the following morning—at eight o'clock on September 28—that the convoy pulled out into the stream and formed single line ahead, with *Otranto* leading. To the screaming of sirens and hooters they steamed down the Hudson—thirteen ships in all. Perhaps an ominous number.

The captain of the *Otranto* had a frown on his face as he paced the bridge. From the Naval Intelligence Department, just prior to casting off, he had received disquieting news. The Nantucket Lightship had reported two enemy super-submarines in her vicinity. The luck of the *Otranto* had been a wonder, but never had she offered such a chance to ill-fortune as now. The captain called his messenger to his side.

"Ask the First Lieutenant to speak to me."

"Aye, aye, sir! "

Number One came quickly to the bridge. The two officers, whose main responsibility it was to safeguard some thousands of souls, passed into the chart-room and went into earnest consultation. They pored over charts.

"Very well," said the captain at last. "We'll take the northerly course."

"Right, sir! I'll get the navigator, then, to lay it off." And with a curt salute Number One went off to find his man.

The northerly course. The captain's decision meant that he was taking the convoy by an unusual route across the Newfoundland Banks. To avoid the human enemy he was ready to face an enemy in nature—fog.

Once the open sea was reached the convoy was formed into three lines of four ships abreast, and a brave sight I thought they looked from the decks of *Otranto* as they thrust the creaming North Atlantic from their bows. Tuesday morning saw us over the 'Banks.' The bad weather we had run into off Cape Sable was worsening hourly. The troops, mainly men from South Georgia who had never seen the sea, were suffering cruelly from sea-sickness.

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All day we passed in and out of fog. It lay so low on the water at times that it shrouded the hulls alone, leaving masts and funnels in sight. It would thicken to a grey mist in which fo'c'sles could not be seen from the bridges. Into a mile of clear water we would all steam, to look like ships in a grey-sided bowl; then the permeable wall of the bowl would blanket us, cutting off sight and almost sound. There could be no diminution of speed, no use of the warning siren. Each ship, held fast to the compass-bearing of the leader, forged at full speed ahead. No lights were shown at night. Smoking on deck was forbidden. Silent, dark, unhearing of anything but the plash and murmur of their own progress, the ships bore swiftly on.

At about half-past nine on the Tuesday night, four days out, I was moving towards the cabin of the 'Red Triangle' man. I was thinking of arranging something for the amusement of the troops. As I moved along the alleyway there was a sudden jolt. The ship momentarily lifted, then fell and beat ahead. She had hit something in the dark.

At the first impact of falling spars I ran for the nearest companionway to deck. Troops were herding to crowd topside.

"Keep below!" I yelled. There was no knowing how long the fall of wreckage would keep on, and a packed deck in the circumstances might mean a filled hospital.

As I arrived on the bridge my idea was confirmed. There had been a collision. But though cries could be heard from the water the night was so dark that nothing could be seen. The Old Man passed the order for the convoy to go on at half-speed. When they had cleared he turned on his searchlights. This was a risky thing to do, for the glare would advertise our presence to any enemy ships or submarines. In the blaze of the searchlights a ship stood in silver. One of her masts had gone by the board; the other was stripped as bare of spars as a country flagpole. Not far from the ship a boat tossed soggily, overladen with human cargo.

Our 'accident boat' was lowered away, and within very little time the shipwrecked men were huddled together on our

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deck. They were scared nearly out of their lives. Some fell on their knees and seemed to beg for mercy.

None of us could make out what language the castaways were talking. French, German, Spanish, were tried on them, but they shook their heads.

"Excuse me, sir," said a quartermaster to me. "Them blokes seem to be slingin' the same lingo as our Jock Ferguson and Bill MacKay use when they're yarnin' private."

"Fetch one of those men along—or both!" I said.

Jock Ferguson was available. He was a Royal Fleet Reserve man, in pre-War days a fisherman in the Orkneys. He had little difficulty in making the shipwrecked men understand him, for they were Breton fishermen, and Jock's Gaelic was akin to their speech.

All the crew of the fishing-vessel were saved. They had been fishing off the cod banks, and, as is the custom of their kind, had turned in at sunset with all lights dowsed. Well off the track even of fishing-craft, they had felt quite safe. The collision had badly holed their bark. It had been filling rapidly when they took to their one boat.

The Breton bark was of wood construction, and it might become derelict and a menace to shipping, so our captain had her sunk by gunfire. By the time this sea precaution had been carried out and *Otranto* could steam in pursuit the convoy had got well ahead. It was not sighted until daybreak, but by noon we were back in position. The fleet was now well across the Atlantic, with the weather growing steadily worse and worse.

§ ii

Spanish flu was raging in most of the ships. The troops had brought the sickness with them from an afflicted camp. From each ship every day came signals asking permission to stop engines for a funeral at sea. On the *Otranto* herself troops were dying like flies. Deaths were so frequent that the bosun and his mates found no time for their sea duties in sewing up the bodies into canvas. It was ghastly to see the corpses, unstiffened from being so recently dead, slide off the gratings.

They would double as they fell, and, instead of plunging smoothly into the deep, hit the surface with resounding thwacks.

I was stopped one morning by a gum-chewing dough-boy.

"Say, Cap," said he (anyone in uniform was 'Cap' to a dough-boy), "there's a guy been lyin' on the smoke-room floor for three days, and he's never moved."

"Let's go and look," I said, and led the way.

In the seats round the lounge and on the deck soldiers in number sprawled in the misery of sea-sickness or the first onset of the epidemic malady. Over by the piano one man lay face downward, his hands stretched out under the instrument. I stooped and caught hold of his legs to pull him clear. At the first grasp of his limbs a faint nausea gripped me, for they were stiff and leaden. I dragged him out and turned him over. Glazed eyes stared up at me. The dead wrists had been gnawed by rats.

Hour by hour the glass dropped, and the tempest whipped the sea with greater rage. Numbers of the ship's crew fell to the epidemic. The captain himself was a victim, but, disobeying the doctor, he stuck to his duties for long spells. Two of the executive officers were babbling in sick-bay. The ship's doctor and the Army doctor were worn to shadows of themselves by fatigue.

On the morning of Sunday, October 6, the storm seemed to have reached its climax. In the mountainous and broken seas three of the ships had drifted out of the convoy. They were nowhere to be seen. It had been expected that by now destroyers and 'planes would be out to meet us and escort us into port. But the viciousness of the weather made that almost impossible—impossible certainly where the aircraft was concerned. It was highly probable, moreover, that the convoy had been blown miles out of its course. No 'sight' had been possible for days, and the exact position of the fleet was indeterminable.

The captain and the navigator had just left the bridge to snatch a hasty breakfast when rain and cloud lifted momentarily, giving the officer on watch a glimpse of land ahead.

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He dispatched the midshipman of the watch at the run to report to the captain, who returned to the bridge at once.

The officer of the watch had a signal hoisted for the convoy to alter course to port. The wind almost blew the signal bunting to shreds. In the bad light, that silver gloom in which colours are so difficult to distinguish, the signal must have been misread on the *Kashmir*, the next ship to *Otranto* on the port side. She altered course to starboard.

Immediately two blasts went up from the *Otranto's* siren to indicate which way she was turning. But the warning was unheeded by the other ship. It was very probably lost to her officers' ears in the clamorous force of the storm. *Kashmir* kept to her starboard turn; the two great ships swung closer, and collision became inevitable. *Otranto's* captain had her helm put hard a-port and rang full speed astern on both engines, at the same time giving three short blasts of the siren.

I heard the siren warnings while down below. They told me something was wrong, and I ran up on deck to walk forward on the starboard side. An American soldier came up to me, camera in hand. Many of the troops had cameras, but the rule was that permission had to be asked before photographing ships and so forth.

"Say, Cap," he said. "Will it be all right for me to snap that big ship?"

"What ship?"

"The one that's coming so close—on the other side now."

I rushed across the alley-way of one of the rooms, followed by the soldier. As I stepped from the alley-way door to port my heart, I do believe, stood still. On the crest of a huge wave, not twenty feet from the ship's side, was poised the axe-like bow of the *Kashmir*. Within a second or two she would strike down upon *Otranto* and cut into her side like a knife into cheese. Not even a miracle could now avert a dreadful disaster. I grabbed the soldier by the arm and hauled him into the alley-way.

At that moment the blow fell. The whole ship shuddered as if in the throes of death. With the grinding and crashing

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of steel plates as they were rent apart, the wrenching of fittings inside the stricken ship, that dreadful clamour, were mingled the shrieks of crushed and tortured men below. The seas threw the two ships apart again, leaving *Otranto* with a hole in her side twenty feet deep and sixteen across. *Kashmir* fell away with no more than a sprung plate or two in her bows.

Whether or not her people realized how deadly a wound the blow had dealt it is hard to say. But, acting strictly in accordance with Admiralty regulations, they wheeled their ship away and drove her on her course as if without a thought for the sinking ship they were leaving. A hard rule, it may seem, that bade seamen leave stricken comrades to their fate, but so many good ships had been sacrificed to the enemy when standing by to rescue drowning crews that firm adherence to the principle of no attempt at life-saving was insisted upon. A sanely cruel rule.

§ iii

Otranto had been struck midway between No. 1 and No. 2 holds, and water was pouring into her rapidly. Her case seemed hopeless. Perfect order, none the less, still held aboard. Our captain tried to turn her so that the breach would be a-lee, but found that the ship had lost steerage way. It was then that the engineer-commander mounted the bridge to report that no more than a hundred pounds' pressure remained in the boilers, and that even this was decreasing steadily. The stokeholds were full of water, but the engine-room so far was only a-wash. If the bulkheads held the ship might possibly float long enough to allow her to be beached.

He had barely finished speaking when the sound of vast rending and tearing rose from the ship's bowels. Men and officers came rushing on deck from below. The vessel gave a great lurch to starboard, and to many it seemed as if she was taking her last plunge.

"There go the bulkheads!" said the engineer.

With that all the lights went out. Escaping steam shrieked deafeningly. The presence of mind and the personal bravery

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of one of the engineers below had saved the ship, beyond doubt, from immediate destruction. He had crawled and swum about the engines, opening and shutting the essential cocks to allow free escape of the steam. But for this the inrush of water to the boilers must have brought an explosion.

During all this terrifying sequence of clamours and lurches the troops had been standing at boat stations in complete discipline. Their nonchalance, though possibly born of ignorance of the gravity of their situation, was admirable. One of their junior officers, however, had been exhibiting great distress. He had been in the way of the ship's officers as they went about their duty, asking them what he should do if he had to take to the water, for he could not swim. One after another of the officers had assured him quietly that the life-belt he was wearing would keep him afloat for many hours, but had warned him to look out not to be struck by floating wreckage. Their placid assurances did nothing to comfort him. He complained of the coldness of the rising water. I myself had just left him with an encouraging word when a revolver-shot rang out. I turned to see the American running round in circles, screaming, with one side of his head blown off. He had tried to blow out his brains, but had managed only to take off a portion of his skull without making himself unconscious. His screams were awful.

Word of the tragedy went along the line of patient soldiery like an electric wave. For a moment or two they wavered; then panic broke among them. Their ranks dissolved, and they swarmed up the companions to take themselves as far away as possible from the encroaching seas.

The impact of the collision had sprung the boat-deck. All of it aft of the parting beam was merely resting on the supports. The blow had shorn the fixing bolts as though they had been putty. To keep the ship as stable as possible it was necessary that all contrivable weight should be concentrated on the lower decks. The officers of the ship ordered the troops to get back to 'C' deck; but panic had the men in its grip, and it is questionable if they even heard the instruction.

The captain meanwhile had gone aft to see how the ship

was behaving astern. He was standing in the after well-deck when the end of the boat-deck, with its load of men, came crashing down atop of him. This was what the ship's officers had predicted. Numbers of the troops were thrown into the sea, while others were smashed by the weight of the deck as it fell on them. The captain was immediately underneath as the crash came. The edge of the falling deck in striking almost decapitated him.

At any moment now the ship, pounded by the heavy seas, might break asunder and go down. The collision had carried away the wireless, so that no message for help could be sent out. Strangely, no ship of the convoy other than *Kashmir* appeared to have seen the collision, and none, therefore, had been tempted to ignore the Admiralty rule against rescue. *Otranto* lay alone, stricken to death, lashed at by hurricane and swept by towering seas.

Then the miracle happened. On the crest of a great wave off the starboard quarter appeared a British destroyer. The men on the sinking ship stared unbelievably; then a spontaneous cheer rose unanimously from all throats aboard. The destroyer's commander signalled. It was impossible for us to use our boats in such a tumult of sea, but if we lowered them to the water's edge he would essay coming alongside, using them as fenders.

And there, by the living God, was a seaman! The commander of *Mounsey* was prepared to risk bringing the thousand tons of his little ship alongside against the crushing bulk of a ship ten times its size. We hastened to obey his instruction, and got the boats down. With incomparable skill and daring the little vessel was brought near to the water-logged *Otranto*. The first boat gave with a rending crash, and the destroyer was swept alongside by an oncoming wave.

"Jump, men—jump!" yelled the destroyer men.

Our seamen, used to the motion of ships, could exercise judgment in their jumping. At times the deck of the destroyer would rise to within eight or ten feet of *Otranto's*, but within a second would have sunk to forty feet below. But the soldiers, panicky and unused to the ways of ships, could

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neither hear orders nor grasp the validity of injunctions to wait for the word to jump. Some crashed on the destroyer's deck when it was in the trough, breaking arms and legs. Some struck with such force on the rise that they were bounced off the deck into the sea. In a sudden low roll of the destroyer a man even threw himself down one of her funnels. The fate of those unfortunates who fell between the two ships was usually awful, for while a lucky few managed to climb aboard ere the gap closed, the majority were crushed horribly to death as the waves forced the vessels together. We on the destroyer later had the dreadful task of ferreting through the mass of indistinguishably mingled flesh clinging to the ship's side for the identity disks of what had once been separate and living beings.

Slowly the rescuing ship crept along the side of the big erst-while liner, and many leapt to safety. A second time, in spite of the damage done her in the first contact, the destroyer was brought alongside. At the end of the second attempt she stood off and signalled that a third could not be risked. She was badly holed. All but two of her oil-tanks had been pierced. Her wireless had carried away, and all her boats were smashed. It was impossible to pick anyone out of the raging seas, but there were cases where men in the water had been flung on her decks. Cases too where they had been washed clean over her from one side to the other.

Until the destroyer stood off I had been helping to get the men to time their jumps properly. I had been instructed by the captain, before he went to his death in the well-deck, to make an effort to get away with any men who might contrive to launch a raft or boat, so that, if port was reached, I might wire to the Admiralty the names of the survivors. He himself, he said, would stick to the ship until the last. Now I remembered the order. My duty was to try to get aboard the destroyer. I had seen the signal that she was not coming alongside again, and I waited until it seemed definite that she would not close again with *Otranto*. Then, timing a wave, I plunged for it.

The crest of the wave swept me on to the destroyer's

fo'c'sle, and I managed to cling to the anti-aircraft gun. In this perilous position I was seen by the men on the bridge. With the seas that were running, the destroyer was 'taking it green,' and her captain brought the ship about to make as much lee as possible forward. A rope was thrown to me then. I caught it and fastened it under my arms, and was hauled to safety round the break of the bridge.

The destroyer then stood clean away from the sinking ship to make for Belfast, her base. It may be conceived with what heavy hearts we of the *Otranto* saw the last of our old ship. She was sinking fast, but drifting towards the land. Our hope was that she would beach in such a way as would let our comrades still aboard get ashore in safety. We now knew that the land we saw was the Hebridean island of Islay.

§ iv

Now trouble arose on the destroyer.

With so many men aboard she was heavily laden. Her deck, in fact, was almost awash. The troops were standing shoulder to shoulder on deck and could not be induced to go below. With that weight atop of her, when the little craft rolled she was in danger of turning turtle or getting on her beam ends.

For the safety of all, of themselves, the troops had to be compelled to go below, and it was done even at the point of revolvers. With the top weight removed the destroyer regained buoyancy and, crippled though she was, made good progress. Her wireless being disabled, there was no way in which the authorities could be informed of the disaster until the entrance to Belfast Lough was reached. A visual signal was sent that a shipwrecked crew was being brought in, and by the time the destroyer berthed ambulances were in waiting to take the injured men to the Royal Victoria Hospital. It was now well past midnight, and nobody had eaten since eight o'clock in the morning. A lot of the men were terribly weak from hunger and exposure. But at last they were all landed, the American troops to be taken in charge by their own

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people, the crew to be mustered and marched off to the Seamen's Home.

Just before that last fateful order, "Abandon ship!" had sounded on *Otranto* the preliminary had been given of "Off coats, off boots!" It was one that all the seamen at least obeyed promptly. But I confess that when I found a dead man under one of the crushed boats of *Mounsey* I was dazed enough to be disappointed, on pulling him out, to find he was one of the obedient. I was in my stockinged feet. The other survivors of *Otranto's* complement were in a like condition, and our march to the Seamen's Home was over roads paved with cobblestones. It was hard going for unshod feet, but the march was not, fortunately, a very long one.

Once in the Home the smell of hot coffee and of frying potatoes soon put fresh heart into us. Plates and plates of fried eggs and potato chips disappeared as if by magic, washed down by cups of steaming hot coffee galore. We were waited on by ladies who had left their comfortable homes in the dead of night to minister to the needs of this shipwrecked crew. The men were but sparsely clothed. Some had been asleep when the disaster took place. One of the ladies, a Miss Cunningham, went off in her car and came back with a load of clothing—suits, shirts, vests, and pants—and boots. I helped her to distribute the stuff to the men. I was glad to see the men get fun out of trying to adapt themselves to those sometimes strange garments. Some diversion was wanted to keep their minds from what lay so recently behind them. One man, a Cockney fireman, found himself in clerical clothes. His antics in them raised howls of laughter among his fellows, but I'm afraid the laughter had in it something of hysteria.

It may serve to tell here—for it should be told—that the destroyer that rescued us, H.M.S. *Mounsey*, was captained by Lieutenant-Commander Craven, R.N. The seamanlike skill and the amazing daring of this officer brought about the saving of nearly six hundred lives. The manner in which he handled his ship and the gallantry of himself and his men are unsurpassed in the annals of the sea. The British Government recognized the fineness of his action with the award of

the Distinguished Service Order, and the American Government paid him the highest honour they could by giving him their Distinguished Service Medal, equivalent to our Victoria Cross. He lost his life, sad to say, a few years later in Ireland.

What of the *Otranto* and the five hundred men still aboard her?

The ship had slowly been drifting shoreward. Those aboard saw the overladen rescue ship depart, but their belief was that the little vessel would never live, so burdened, in such a sea. They hoped for themselves that *Otranto* would pile herself up on the sandy beach they now saw ahead. But fate was against them. A strong northerly set inshore carried the wreck up the coast under high cliffs, against which the seas broke with gigantic power. The ship in shallow water crashed repeatedly on submerged rocks as she sank in the troughs. She was rapidly falling to pieces, and many men jumped overboard to take their chance of gaining the rocky shore. But there was a strong undertow which dragged them down to drown.

Islanders who had seen the helpless vessel came down to the shore, armed with nets, ropes, and poles to aid the swimmers. It was impossible for them to launch a boat in such a sea on such a coast. All they could hope to do was wade out where wading was possible, and, as far as they dared, to attempt getting ropes and poles into the hands of drowning men before the undertow sucked them back.

The loss of life was appalling. Of the five hundred odd souls that had been left on the big ship only sixteen got ashore alive. For days after *Otranto* foundered the bodies of the drowned were hurled up the gullies and inlets that serrate the island coast. As they were recovered they were carried up and laid alongside other dead shipmates. The island went into mourning for two days. Then a funeral procession was formed with pipers at the head. To the keening notes of a lament representatives of the Admiralty and of the American Government, followed by the island inhabitants almost to a man, walked to the cemetery, where, side by side, American soldier and British sailor were laid to rest. Beside them were buried the Breton fishers rescued by the *Otranto*. None of them

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survived the second disaster which overtook them within a week.

The graveyard is on the western coast of Islay, by the little village of Kilchoman. It is called the Otranto Cemetery. A monument stands among the green mounds. And this is the inscription on it:

THIS CROSS OF SACRIFICE IS ONE IN DESIGN AND INTENTION
WITH THOSE WHICH HAVE BEEN SET UP IN FRANCE AND
BELGIUM AND OTHER PLACES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD WHERE
OUR DEAD OF THE GREAT WAR ARE LAID TO REST.

Their Name liveth for Evermore

XVIII

ARMISTICE AND AFTER

A STRANGE England it was to return to after four years' absence. Arriving at Liverpool, I promised some of my shipmates that I would take them to a restaurant where they served plump, juicy steaks. As we had not tasted one for many days the prospect sounded alluring.

We must have looked a queer crowd as we entered the room. I forget how my pals were dressed, but I wore an enormous woollen pullover given me by Miss Cunningham in Belfast. A woman there had made it for her son, who had been killed. He must have been a giant. For footwear I wore a pair of brown canvas shoes also miles too large.

The waiter came to our table, and in a lordly voice I ordered a large porterhouse steak covered with mushrooms. The man looked at us and then went off to the manager. That gentleman came along rubbing his hands.

"Can I have your meat coupons?" he asked.

We'd never seen them, so I said, "We were only picked out of the ditch yesterday. I'm afraid we've lost them."

But this cut no ice with him. No coupons, no steak, he insisted. I'm always grateful to two ladies sitting at the next table. They couldn't help hearing the conversation, and they came forward and with a graceful smile offered us their coupons. Of course we didn't accept their offer, and in the end we dined off salt bacon, which we had lived on for months at sea. Among my pals my reputation as caterer took a severe dint.

What a queer sight we must have made as we came off the train at Euston! We could laugh at ourselves, but there was often a catch in the throat for the many who were not with us—taken by the sea. I had to report at the Admiralty first and leave my address. It was a mistake. The wives, mothers,

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and sisters of the men lost in *Otranto* kept imploring me to see them in the hope that I could give them some last message, some fragment of glory, to hug to themselves in place of the lost. For a fortnight I played the comforter, but it meant reliving the disaster over and over again and accumulating sorrow upon sorrow. It became too great for me. I collapsed, and the doctor told me that if I wanted to keep my reason I should have to go away and forget all about ships and drowning.

But amid all there was sometimes a strange, even comic, touch. I will only tell of one.

We had on board a little Jew named Kerinsky. He had been a tailor working in the East End somewhere. When the crew found that he could wield a needle better than a shovel—he was a stoker—they gave him jobs, and of course paid him for his work. Unofficially he became ship's tailor and amassed quite a goodly sum. When we arrived in New York on this last fatal voyage he asked me to take care of twenty-five pounds for him.

In the tragedy I had entirely forgotten the incident, but it was brought home to me one day at the Admiralty. The messenger at the entrance stopped me one morning and said that the Chief Cashier would like to see me in his room. I went along, and the official handed me a letter—two, in fact, for one was pinned to the other—to read. The first note, written on a dirty scrap of paper in a thin, wavery hand, read:

DEAR SIR,

I lost my only son in your ship *Otranto*. You will see why I am writing by his letter. Here it is.

M. KERINSKY

This was the letter enclosed:

DEAR MUM AND DAD,

You will be proud to know that your son is a hero. While we were in New York harbour the Captain fell overboard, and I dived into the river and saved him. For this he gave me twenty-five pounds, and I have given it to the Paymaster to mind for me till I come home. Then I'm going to take you both out and stand treat,

Your loving son,

ABE

I handed the letters back.

"Of course, the story of the rescue is not true, but the man certainly gave me twenty-five pounds to mind. My writer will confirm the fact." And I explained how the man came by the money.

"What do you propose I should do about it, then?" asked the official.

I thought hard for a second or two. "Well," I said, "the man's people are entitled to the money. They have lost their only son. The captain is dead. Why not let the old folks live happy in the belief that their son was the hero he made himself out to be?"

The man of facts and figures had no liking for any form of deception, but he caught sight of my eyes. I admit there was a suspicion of moisture in them. He cleared his throat.

"All right," he said; "I'll pass a voucher for the full amount."

"Splendid; and, if you will allow me, I'll take the money to them."

After some difficulty I found the home in a mean street down the Whitechapel Road. I had some trouble in getting them to let me in, but when they learned that I had the money from the Admiralty the old man altered his attitude. In the small, dingy room was a table, and on it a photograph of their dear dead son who had given his life for King and country—a hero to them, and a hero to me too.

I wish that such an easy means had been available for consoling all the bereaved parents and wives.

I was in Chatham Barracks when Armistice was declared. Of course we all went mad, and I got as drunk as everybody else. But it was some time before their lordships finished with my services. I joined H.M.S. *Erebus*, and we patrolled the Belgian coast. She was one of those weird craft called monitors, shaped like a huge saucer, and with blisters on her sides that reminded one of the old turret ships.

Then I was sent to join one of the ships just handed over to the Allies. It was *Friedrichsruhe*, once the pride of the

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Hamburg-America Line, *Prinz Bismarck*. We went to South-end to take over from the Germans, and I shall ever remember the expression on the faces of the Germans. They stood to attention as we entered the dining-saloon, for we all had a meal together. Then when we rose to leave they stood up. As I left I turned and saw them busy sweeping the crumbs off the table and the pieces of fat left on the plates into their handkerchiefs to take back with them to Germany.

We took the Fourth Division of Australian soldiers back, under the command of Colonel Caddy, D.S.O. Ken Prior, editor of the *Sydney Bulletin*, was one of the officers, and he ran a most amusing paper while on the ship. On board also were Mr Hughes—"Billy," the diggers called him—and Sir Joseph Cook, the then High Commissioner.

We sailed under the Armistice flag designed as a universal standard for ships not yet allocated to the various Powers. It took precedence of all others.

We had the greatest difficulty in collecting a crew at Glasgow prior to sailing. We had hoped to bring our own men from Tilbury, but were informed that we should have to take a crew from the port of sailing. When we actually signed them on we had as fine a gang of skulkers as could be picked up anywhere. Indeed, the night before we sailed the police came aboard with a book of photographs—a Rogues' Gallery—of men wanted by them. I identified several of the beauties, but the police did not propose to arrest them. They were only too glad to see them out of the country. Two were implicated in a brutal murder and were members of a well-known gang of toughs. I had occasion to remember this later. The crew gave trouble from the start. Their union leaders were on board, and worked up disputes on the smallest excuse.

We had the wives and children of some of the officers aboard, which livened up the voyage, but all sorts of scares were floating around. The second night or so I went into the saloon. It was magnificently fitted, and a splendid piano was incorporated in the panelling, but no one was making any attempt to play it.

"What about a tune?" I asked.

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There was no answer. Every one looked scared. Then a steward told me it was rumoured that one of the keys was in electrical contact with an infernal machine designed by the former owners, on the first attempt at playing the piano, to blow the ship sky-high.

"Stand by," I said. I walked over to the instrument, pressed a thumb-nail on the top ivory, and ran it right down the keyboard. The effect of the glissade was to blanch the faces of the passengers completely, but it thoroughly killed the booby-trap idea. From then on the piano pounded an accompaniment to many a roaring chorus.

One night I found a note pinned to my pillow. It read, "Place a hundred pounds outside your cabin door to-night, or beware of the Red Hand." A rough drawing of a red hand was affixed as a signature. I took it as a great joke and showed it at once to the captain. He was serious about it, and said that members of that gang were in the ship and that the police had warned him privately about them. He sent for the O.C. troops and asked him to place a sentry over my cabin. This was done for the remainder of the voyage. Day or night nobody was allowed near my cabin except my personal servant.

As we neared Cape Town a notice was put up in the crew's quarters stating that, as we were staying only twelve hours, no shore leave would be granted. This did not suit them at all.

We arrived alongside about six-thirty in the evening. Passengers were having an early meal and were awaiting service. A steward came to me and said that two gentlemen wished to see me. I thought they might be agents from shore and said, "Bring them along."

"They won't come," he replied. "They want to see you outside the saloon."

I thought this rather strange conduct, and went aft to see who they were. To my surprise they turned out to be the two union delegates who had made all the trouble. In a truculent tone one asked, "No shore leave for the crew?"

"You've seen the official notice, haven't you?" I asked.

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The delegate walked to the head of the gangway and called out, "Everybody ashore."

The men had been waiting for the word, and they began to walk down the gangway. In less than five minutes all hands were lined up on the wharf. The delegates would not listen to reason. They demanded six hours' leave for each watch and a pound advance per man. Argument was useless. We had to submit.

The following morning, after the official shore visit had been paid, the return call was made to the ship. Among the high officials calling was General Botha. Now I was not taking part in the reception as I had much work to do in the short time at my disposal. I had just finished a pipe and was standing behind the group of officers told off for the duty. General Botha saw me, and for some reason he came straight up to me, holding out his hand. I was so taken aback that I hastily crammed my pipe into my pocket before taking the offered hand. As he stood talking to me in friendly fashion I became aware of an awful smell of burning; then wisps of smoke showed from inside my coat-collar. The General saw that my pocket was on fire, and quickly guessed the cause. His great Dutch laugh at my expense pealed through the ship.

We left Cape Town six men short. I had given instructions to the agent to send them on to Durban by train if they turned up.

Durban turned out a vast crowd to welcome the ship. The returning 'Diggers' were made much of indeed, but in the picnics, outings, and concerts arranged for them the ship's crew was not forgotten. A dance was arranged at a place some miles from Durban—Fern Tree Gully I think it was called. The band of the troops was to play, and it was proposed to send them out by charabanc, the officers following later in private cars.

Unfortunately the charabanc called rather early to pick up the band, and our hosts had time to give them a lot of hospitality before the actual affair began. The result was that the boys found playing difficult right from the start, and after a time could not play at all. If it had not been for the

good offices of a charming lady, who played the piano, the evening would have been a fiasco.

Five hectic days were spent in Durban, and then we had orders to get under way. The missing men of the engine-room had not turned up. I sent for the firemen's delegate and put the matter to him.

"You know the engine-room is now six men short?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, I have been to the shipping office daily, but there are no men to be had. In the circumstances, if Colonel Caddy can find among the troops six men willing to work I'll pay them union rates. As soon as we get to Australia I'll find six other union men."

"That's fair, sir," the man admitted. And we got under way.

The cheers of the concourse that had sped us were hardly out of our ears when the ship's engines stopped. A minute later a messenger came running to my cabin to say that the captain wanted me on the bridge. The two delegates were there. Although the men found by Colonel Caddy were quite willing to work and were getting union pay, the firemen were objecting. The soldiers didn't hold union tickets. The crew refused to work the ship to Australia, and we had to put back to Durban. It was beyond words maddening. Whatever view may be held of the protection for workers through their unions, there can be hardly any justification for dealing with a ship in such a manner.

I went to the shipping office and put the case to the shipping master. He raised hell and heaven to get men for us, but succeeded only in picking up three with tickets. A fourth man I took with me to the ship, but did not dare to sign him on until I had consulted the delegates. He had a union ticket, but it was not a British one. He was an American subject. A delegate went and conferred with the men. At last, in their view conceding greatly, they consented to work the ship with two men short in the engine-room and with an American ticket-holder in their midst.

And so, with sirens and hooters shrieking welcome to the

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ship as she steamed up Sydney Harbour, that most troublesome and vexatious voyage—certainly the most irritating and wearisome in my long experience—came to an end.

§ ii

In December 1920 the Admiralty concluded I had done my bit. I was demobbed with a small sum as war gratuity and the promise of prize money to follow.

After six years of routine I found it difficult to adjust myself to freedom. I had seen a deal of service. Throughout the War I had been ashore very infrequently, and now I felt the time had come to 'swallow the anchor.' My mother was growing old, and her health was not good. The War had left British shipping in a poorish way. I made up my mind to chuck the sea and to try wresting a livelihood by activity on land.

For the first two years matters went with reasonable smoothness. I had my gratuity, and imagined it would last for ever. I took a temporary job as lecturer in mathematics and geography at a large private school. There were indications that I would make good. Unfortunately, however, the school shifted its quarters from London to the middle of Sussex, a move that was of benefit to the scholars, but that left me stranded. It was useless applying for a job afloat. There were old ship-mates of mine selling matches in the street, and officers with master's tickets held themselves lucky to find jobs before the mast.

For months I spent time and money calling on City friends who in other days would have done something for me. But the whole country had gone topsy-turvy; nobody knew where he was in trade, and jobs were at a premium. I had only one real 'break.'

I took on a job as courier. A man who was taking a party of Americans for a six weeks' trip through England, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and France went down with pneumonia some hours before he was due to meet his 'crush' on *Bremen*. His boss happened to mention the matter to me despairingly, and I stepped into the breach. This was daring

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of me. My knowledge of the world, except for Canada, was confined largely to ports and coasts. But I thought I was sufficiently polyglot to get along.

I had imagined my party as being composed of men and women, with perhaps a youngster or two of both sexes. My heart sank when, having boarded *Bremen* from the tender, I found that what I was conducting round Europe was a bunch of college girls. It looked as if I had taken on more than I could manage. Who was I to take care of a dozen or more good-looking, upstanding, marvellously turned out damsels, with enough beauty among them to bedazzle any sailor-man?

Yet, for all my forebodings, the tour was a marvellous success. There were scrapes, of course, that some of them had to be got out of, and times when I had to be completely the Dutch uncle, but I look back on those six weeks as one of my best memories. The small mischiefs of those girls were very occasional, the outcome of no more than the bubbling spirit of youth. It was fun to deal with them—fun and something better. They left me with a high opinion of the American girl they typified. Their charming common sense, the eager interest they showed in everything of beauty and cultural value that came into their view, their wit and their inherent kindness and lack of ‘side,’ made the job of courier to them one of the happiest experiences of my life. It was all too brief a six weeks.

The finish of the courier job saw me back on my search. I tried my hand at writing short stories and articles, and I had the luck herein to arouse the interest of Mr George William Blackwood. I sent a short story to “Maga,” and almost by return received the galley proofs for correction. With the spectre of unemployment ahead, this success cheered me up. I still looked for steady work, but in my spare time I wrote. I bought a small typewriter on the ‘never-never’ plan, and soon was bombarding magazines and periodicals with ‘copy.’ I was fairly successful. My life experience stood me in good stead. I discovered that things that had happened to me, but that I had considered too trivial to talk about, were of interest to

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others. But there was a lot of competition in journalism, and I wanted something steady—a business.

I made myself a publisher.

I made myself a publisher without knowing anything of publishing. I argued that if publishers refused my stuff I could easily print it myself. And one morning, pondering the notion as I walked from Fleet Street to the riverside, I saw a notice, "Offices to let." In that instant I made up my mind. I went into the building and asked to see the agent.

"Show me some of these offices you have to let," I said.

He looked me over cannily, and before taking me round told me that "all rents were payable in advance." My bank balance was well under fifty pounds. I reckoned how much I dared spend on one quarter's rent, and ultimately took on a room at a rental of fifteen pounds per quarter. I paid that down at once, and asked the caretaker, or agent, to send a signwriter to me.

"What d'you want on the door, guv'nor?"

"Write 'Campbell and Co.' in big letters," I said. "And underneath, smaller, put 'Publishers.'"

Among my friends I numbered a man who was head of a big firm of wholesale distributors. I went to see him. When I told him what I had done he roared with laughter.

"I know men," he said, "who've been in Fleet Street thirty years, and in the publishing trade at that, but who would never have the pluck to do what you've done."

I murmured something about "fools rushing in." He sat pensive for a moment or two. Then he looked up at me straightly.

"Damned if I don't back you, old man," he said. "You come and see me any time you want to know anything, and I'll run along to your office lunch-times. Between us we'll make a success of this business. See if we don't!"

He was better than his word. In a week or so he introduced me to the proprietor of a new magazine who wanted a publisher. On the advice of my friend I was given the job. By the end of my first year I was publishing six magazines.

I worked on this principle—or lack of it: if a customer

asked me something beyond my ken, but that as a publisher I ought to have known, I would knit my brows and give an impersonation of a serious man thinking carefully. Then I would say that I'd like time to think the question over, and that I would write the inquirer that night. As soon as the customer left I would ring up my friend and arrange to meet him. In consultation I would learn how to deal with the problem. I cannot believe there was anything greatly dishonest in the method. I simply got the best possible advice for my clients on distribution and such problems. And I really came to know the ins and outs of magazine publishing. My mentor retired a few years ago, and the 'Trade' gave him a farewell luncheon. I can say that of the many expressions of regret with which the speeches were laden none had more sincerity than mine.

My office had its share of queer visitors. A tall, cadaverous man opened my door cautiously one day, glided inside, and locked the door on himself and me. It was lunch-time, and I was alone. He stole up to my desk and pointed to the clerk's office.

"Anyone in that other room?" he whispered.

I was at a loss whether to say yes or no, but I fenced by asking, "Why?"

"Got something here I want to show you," he whispered, and pulled a paper packet out of his wallet.

He cast a furtive glance towards the door, dug a hand into the side-pocket of his overcoat, and produced a revolver. "You never know—you never know!" he muttered to himself. He laid the gun beside the paper packet on my desk, and sat down in the chair facing me.

"Just out of 'stir' this morning," he said. His face had the prison look, ashen for lack of fresh air and sunshine. I waited for him to go on.

"Wandsworth," he said. "Spent the last few weeks in the 'sanny.' Next bed to me was Kennedy. It was him and Browne that did the cop in—you know, Gutteridge."

He opened the packet and took out an envelope. From this he impressively extracted a page of closely written script.

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"Know what this is?" he whispered, pointing to the page. "Kennedy's confession! Wrote it this very morning. I managed to get it out of prison. What's it worth to you?"

I took the paper and read it through. It did read as a confession, and the writer said that any profits from its sale should be given to his wife and family. The thing had the look of being genuine.

"But what can I do with it?" I asked my visitor.

"Why," he said, "publish it the morning of the execution. Have runners in the streets. You'll sell thousands, tuppence a time."

I did not show much keenness. He became persuasive.

"And look here," he said. "Day of publication I'll do my bit to get publicity."

"In what way?"

"Morning the leaflet appears I'll go down to the Embankment and chuck myself into the Thames."

"Commit suicide?"

"Blow it, no!" said my visitor. "I'm a damn' good swimmer. I'll let 'em rescue me and charge me with attempted suicide. Then in court I'll tell the beak I'd been so upset reading one of the pamphlets about Kennedy that I tried to do myself in. That'll sell 'em—sure!"

The fellow had ideas. But I didn't feel like reaping the fortune he proposed sowing for me, and I said so. My refusal upset him, but I calmed him down by ringing up a friend on one of the Sunday papers. The journalist jumped at the chance, and his paper published the confession under blazoned headlines.

§ iii

It may be imagined that, with my inexperience, I did not escape encounter with the publisher's bugbear—the law of libel. I had been writing book reviews for one of the papers I was running. One morning I opened a registered letter to learn that a well-known authoress was taking action against me for libel. The amount of damages she claimed was a thousand pounds. The letter threw me into a thorough scare.

It was from a firm of solicitors. I hadn't a thousand pence in the bank.

I rang up the house that had published the book I had reviewed and asked for the address of the author. Fortunately I had a friend in the house, and he told me the authoress was staying at a West End hotel. I made no mention of my plight, but as soon as he rang off I 'phoned the hotel and was put through to the lady. I told her I was interested in her book and asked permission to call on her. I was invited to tea that afternoon.

It looked, from her surprise when I was ushered into the room, as if she had mistaken me for some one else. She quickly put me at my ease, however, and tea was served. I should have said, perhaps, that the lady gave me every chance to be at ease, and I hope externally I looked it. But I was fidgeting in my mind as to how I might approach the reason for my visit. I talked flatteringly of her book. We were getting along nicely. Then as casually as I could contrive I got to the object of my call.

"Madam," I said, "why are you suing me for libel?"

"Ha!" said she. "So you're the reviewer my solicitors have written to. They say you think my book's obscene."

"Well, madam, I was giving an honest opinion. My review will probably help the sales."

Then I explained my financial position. I said that going after me for any sum at all was simply a waste of powder and shot. She said she would communicate with her solicitors, who would probably make an appointment with me.

When I met the lawyers they were so stunned by my pennilessness that all they bade me do was withdraw my objectionable adjective in the next issue of the magazine. This, of course, I was ready enough to do. But the experience taught me to be more careful in the future. Incidentally, I had a valuable bit of free advice from the solicitors. They told me that if I had used the phrase 'in my opinion' I should have been immune from prosecution.

I reached the point of handling eleven publications in my office, and the 'Trade' was beginning to recognize me. I had

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a manager, two clerks, and a traveller. I was on the road to moderate success.

Then came the years of depression. The proprietors of some of my periodicals were nipped in the Hatry crash, and the first thing they dropped was the luxury of owning a paper. I lost a good part of my income. Even well-established firms were 'feeling the draught.' A good number closed down. The rapid growth of the twopenny libraries was turning public taste from magazines to books. Things began to look bad again.

In the middle of the downward curve I had a sudden and distressing deprivation. On the Monday before Christmas Day my manager's wife called at the office and told me her husband had not been home since Friday night. I rang up the local police and gave them his full description. It was possible, I thought, that he had met with an accident and was lying in hospital unconscious. His wife, when she heard that he had not been to the office, was greatly upset. But we could do nothing, and she went home.

Next morning I had a telephone call from Mortlake Police-station. A body had been recovered from the Thames and was lying in the mortuary for identification. In the pocket of the coat had been found a letter addressed to Campbell and Co. I hurried to the place, and there on the slab lay all that was mortal of my old friend and manager. His loss, to say nothing of its more humanly affecting aspect, threw my business badly out of gear. He had managed all the book-keeping. I had to bring in a firm of chartered accountants at considerable expense just when money was shortest.

The depression grew steadily worse. I had to let my staff go and find a means of livelihood on my own. I walked out of my office, and all I possessed in the world was in my trousers-pocket. One very valuable asset, however, remained. I had made friends with many of the managers of Messrs W. H. Smith and Son's and Wyman's bookstalls, and was able through them to obtain displays and increase sales of books and periodicals. I still count them as my best friends.

One day I finished writing the story of the loss of H.M.S.

Otranto. My intention was to send it to a magazine. But my wife, having read it, made a then startling suggestion.

"Why not," she said, "send it to the B.B.C.?"

It was a novel notion, but I acted on it. A few days passed, and then I had a letter saying that the story had been approved for broadcasting—would I call and have my voice tested? It was thought, if possible, that the story would be best put over as the account of an eyewitness. I called as requested. It was found that I had a good broadcasting voice.

For more reasons than the mere stage-fright of it I have good cause to remember that first broadcast. In the studio that Sunday evening I watched the hand of the clock creep towards the minute when I had to begin talking to some forty million people. I was speaking on the Empire as well as the National station. I felt like one of the aristocrats in *A Tale of Two Cities*—where they wait to be called by number to enter the tumbril. Two minutes before the appointed time a man came into the studio. I took him to be the announcer. "Now for it," I said. But it was an engineer to test the room for sound. A minute later the announcer came in with a calm that I considered supernatural.

"Are you ready, Commander?" he said.

"No," I replied. "I'm hot and bothered, scared stiff, and——"

He took no notice of my whinings, but approached the 'mike.'

"We have," he said, "in the studio this evening . . ."

And I was on the air.

The broadcast was a success. I had many letters from survivors and from relatives of those lost in the *Otranto* tragedy. A number of old shipmates and friends of old shipmates came to Broadcasting House to make contact with me again.

I have told in the first pages of this book how, because the set word rather cramped my style, I was permitted to speak in the microphone without script. I have done many broadcasts since, several by television, always with no more guide than rough notes on the matter about which I've been talking. My material has mostly been drawn from my own personal

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experiences. If I must yarn, as I said to begin with, I like to do it on my feet, as though I were talking to friends in the club, the wardroom, or the family circle.

In writing these personal yarns I have realized how much different is the spoken from the written word. In speaking a slight difference in tone will colour a whole incident. I have found it very difficult to get these effects in ink on paper.

I have found, however, a novel happiness in reliving these scenes of my life, and my hope is that in writing of them I have conveyed something of their thrills, sorrows, and laughs to my readers. Sailors and soldiers have a way of saying, in abnormal circumstances, "We don't get much money, but we *do* live!" And here is the only claim I make for my book. I have never in my existence been more than a hundred pounds 'ahead of the game,' but, I hope demonstrably, I have seen life. Life has been for me a continuous process of having the corners knocked off, and here merely is an accumulation of the chips.

